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HORSES IN THE SKY



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HORSES IN THE SKY

by

LARRY BARRETTO

*Only a fool goes looking for the wind
That blew across his heartstrings yesterday . . .
Only a fool drives horses in the sky.*

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

New York

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For
LOUIS BROMFIELD
*who shares with me
memories of 1918 and the Aisne*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LARRY BARRETTO was born at Larchmont, New York, May 30, 1890. He was educated at Hoosac School, Hoosick, New York. During the World War he served for two years with the U. S. Army Ambulance Corps, attached to the French Army, and was decorated with the Croix de Guerre. He has engaged in a variety of occupations, but his literary career began in 1920 as assistant editor of *Adventure Magazine*. Following this he was for two years dramatic critic for *The Bookman*. In 1924 he began free-lance writing, and has contributed short stories to many magazines.

Mr. Barretto is the author of several previously published novels: *Old Enchantment*, *A Conqueror Passes*, *To Babylon* and *Walls of Glass*.

HORSES IN THE SKY



PART ONE

ON August 2nd, Jerry Tower's nineteenth birthday, war between France, Russia and Germany was declared. The two events coming together were exciting and, because they were linked, seemed fraught with significance for him. It was as if the powers of Europe had combined to celebrate his birth with a clash of arms that echoed round the world, or, more sinister thought, the anniversary of his birth had some malefic effect on the European powers. He pondered this for some time; it was an interesting if improbable theory.

Then romantically his thoughts turned to what might be happening across the sea. He pictured Uhlans—if that was the term—besieging castles, being repulsed and riding off again to re-form under banners and pennants whipping in the wind. There was a great deal of martial music playing, but from which side it came he could not tell. He imagined generals, or other high officers, situated on convenient hill-tops, directing their men. It would be pleasant to be a general. Always they sat motionless on bronze horses while orders issued from stern

lips. But generals were usually old. Jerry Tower realized with a moment of regret that in spite of his present birthday he was hardly the age. He grinned at the idea. Neither was he German, Russian or even French. On the whole he decided that he did not want to be a general even if his years made that possible; the responsibilities involved were too great. He knew that because of the exalted position there must be responsibilities attached. There usually were to all positions of merit; that, he was learning, was one of the disagreeable realities of life.

So, in the war which was just starting, he could not be a general; nevertheless his interest carried him into a stationery shop where he bought several papers and a map. Then he started home through Waynesboro's quiet, elm-shaded streets. He thought of stopping at the granite bank where his father sat in the room the door of which was marked Vice President, to thank him for the car which he had found that morning before the front door, with his initials on it, but there would be time for that later.

There was always, Jerry found, time later for disagreeable errands. Not that thanking his father was disagreeable, but the atmosphere of the bank repelled him ever so slightly. It was formal, it was dim and the men who worked in it were always grave. For a boy, laughter-loving and given to pleasure, it was a reminder that some day his steps

must turn in that direction. His father had worked hard solely that his only son might escape his troubles, but Jerry, contemplating his future, was not particularly grateful.

On the veranda of his house, on High Street off Center, he opened his map and spread it before him. His very dark head bent over the table and his black eyes became intent while his forefinger traced a line. He had to peer a little for the clematis in heavy-blooming masses shut off the light. The air was filled with the hum of drowsy bees from his mother's garden outside; the sunlight beyond the shadow of the house was dry and hot and bright.

Jerry found the names of several places which the papers had mentioned—Brussels and Louvain, then his finger wandered farther on. Paris of course. Idly he picked a spot and began reading the names of towns around it—Soissons, Compiègne, Senlis. He was rather pleased with his accent. Now he was glad that he had boned on French as his mother wished. It was to some purpose that he had waded through the classics—Racine, Molière. He found more names in smaller print—Vic, Crépy, Eplessier . . .

A voice hailed him from the garden walk.
"Hello, Jerry."

"Hello, Spike," he returned to the tow-headed youth who stood there.

"Going to the ball game this afternoon? Montgomery's got a good team."

Jerry stood up, and the map slipped to the floor. "Absolutely," he said promptly. There was something else he had promised to do, but that became unimportant. "We'll go in my new car," he continued. "The old man came across with it for my birthday. How do you like it?"

"She's a humdinger," Spike exclaimed enviously. "You're a lucky devil, do you know it? I never saw you work for anything. It just comes your way."

"Oh, I don't know," Jerry protested, vaguely discontented. "Sometimes I get done out of things."

"It's probably your own fault then," Spike answered. He had some obscure reason for his criticism, but it was not quite clear to him. What he meant was that if Jerry Tower, popular and good looking, whose father was important in the bank, failed to attain any of his desires it was because his own indifference was at the bottom of it.

They inspected the car and then walked down the drive.

"Say, Jerry, Tom's got something very nice he visits every night."

"Ha!" cried Jerry wisely. "A wench."

"But that's not all," Spike continued. "I heard—" They lowered their voices at the nearness of the house.

"Have you heard Martin Seabrook was engaged?" Spike asked after a time.

"So he has been able to make up his mind after five years." Jerry was amused. "That's not my idea of love. It ought to be something swift and romantic like a flash of lightning. Bang! And you're swept off your feet."

"That's not love," Spike said positively. "That's passion."

"No, I don't suppose love is like that," Jerry agreed, his flash of enthusiasm for something vivid and beautiful gone, "but it ought to be. I hate to be careful."

Youthfully self-conscious, they veered from a subject which seemed to have such dangerous implications beneath the surface and spoke of the just declared war.

"I think it would be swell to go," Jerry announced. "And I will if it keeps up long enough. Nothing ever happens in Waynesboro."

"It'll be over in a month," Spike predicted. "There's nothing to it."

But the horses of war were again sweeping over Europe, thundering across the sky, ridden by Death and all his plagues. Jerry could not see them, nor could Spike. Thousands, straining up, heard only the faintest sound of cannon in their hooves; in the snorting of their breath there was only a suggestion of the roll of drums.

Later Mrs. Tower found the discarded map and thrust it into a desk drawer. Jerry never asked for it. Life for him drifted on: Warm bland days—picnics, the gang at the drug store—talk—baseball, cars, girls. Save for headlines he had become incurious about the war.

About this time in Eplessier, Jernot, the *huissier*, was fastening a notice to the door of the *mairie* and another to the door of the church which stood across the way on the Place Bucot. To pin a notice solely concerned with a governmental regulation to the door of this or any church was a thing unheard of, but Jernot did not hesitate. He knew his business, did this *huissier*, and knowing it he realized that there would be no complaint from *monsieur le curé*, no, not if he had affixed his flimsy sheet to the high altar itself. But here he hesitated, for the thought seemed unpleasantly like sacrilege, and with the thumb tacks clutched in his fist he made the sign of the cross on his chest, awkwardly and hurriedly. One could never tell; it was well to be on the safe side, and at this time it might not be amiss to show a little extra respect. Especially at this time— He returned to the Government's announcement.

People were running from every side, coming from shops, from alleys between them, from the church itself where a funeral had been conducted,

to read the *affiche* tacked up by Jernot. They pressed forward, indifferent to crushed toes and sharp elbows, to stare up at the paper above their heads gayly outlined in blue, white and red. Even to those in the back of the crowd the black letters in large type which came first were plainly visible.

"Citizens, mobilization does not mean war."

They argued this among themselves, men and women with importunate children darting between them. The President of the Republic had intended it to be consoling, but they were not to be deceived. In that first moment of hard, high patriotism which had sprung to life at the official notice and the national colors they did not want to be consoled. France had fought the German before; she would do so again. So be it. Lands whose statues were always wreathed in mourning flowers were to be redeemed; old scores were to be avenged. Very well. Redemption and vengeance would follow—with God's help. The voices of the crowd rose shriller, echoing about the stone tower of the old church, breaking in the soft warm upper air against the gargoyles and the belfry on which sleek gray pigeons sat.

Jernot, standing a little way off, was immensely pleased with the sensation he had made. He even assisted Madame L'Empreur, who had gouty feet and varicose veins and who could not walk far, from her *café* on the corner in order that she might

see the sight. War had come to Eplessier, and it was almost as if he had brought it.

Farther along on the street a carriage to which was hitched a sorrel horse stood before a shop in whose windows were bolts of print cotton neatly folded on boards, papers of pins, lengths of elastic and all the other small goods which went to make up the stock of the *mercerie*. Two women who had just completed a purchase after polite haggling were seated in the buggy preparing to drive away. The attention of the younger woman was attracted to the crowd which pressed about the door of the church.

"Monsieur Jernot has received another announcement," she exclaimed. "There is further news of the situation, grandmother. I must go see."

The old woman made a gesture of protest, denying thereby what she feared to believe. "It is nothing. Another *canard* from Paris. They send out too many."

The girl, however, was insistent. She handed the reins to her grandmother and jumped from the buggy. "I shall not be long. Even Madame L'Empereur is looking." She hurried toward the church.

Left alone, Madame Collette Moreau looked at the increasing crowd with misgivings. There was in its uneasy surging to and fro something ominous like the herd of cows she had once seen driven down the main highway which, becoming alarmed at an

unexpected obstacle, had after a moment of tense milling with lowered heads turned and crashed into the fields beyond, crushing a child who sat upon a rock. The obstacle had been the first automobile ever seen in Eplessier and that had been years ago, but the old woman still remembered. Albertine had just run from the *mercerie*, although this was not the hour for closing, and had joined the crowd. A man was speaking. Madame Moreau recognized him although she could not hear his words, and her lip drew down in scorn. This one was Dupuy, the *agent de gare*, and a firebrand. What was he doing here when the afternoon train was due at 17:28? They cheered what he said, and down the street shadowed by the western sun came the patter of applause. Madame Moreau gave herself up to bitter reflections.

There were in Eplessier people as old as herself, and many more who while younger could still remember, but apparently they chose to forget. She herself would never forget, the years 1870-71, the advance of the Germans, the seige of Paris to which city she had fled only to starve for months on unspeakable bread rations and occasional bits of meat which, one hoped while eating, might be cat although stories that the gamins were driving the rats from their sewers to sell in the butcher stalls were current. That had given her for cities a loathing which she had never overcome. Loss, loss, loss. The

farm had been a ruin on their return, implements gone, cattle stolen, a barn burned. And as the thunders of Sedan faded they had begun to pay, louis by louis, franc by franc, sou by sou for each yard of land the retiring Germans yielded up to them. A new burst of cheering reached her and Madame Moreau acknowledged the cause of it with a sour smile. Some one had flung the tricolor of France from the window of an upper room. She knew now that the *affiche* meant war.

But when Renée, her granddaughter, returned the old woman said nothing of the apprehensions and the hatreds which had stirred again in her heart. The girl was excited, her fair, pale skin which resisted sun and rain was flushed, her gray eyes wide, and she was breathless although she had not run.

"It is war!" she exclaimed as she climbed into the buggy. "Dupuy says so."

Her grandmother made a sound which might have been a snort.

"But it is true," the girl insisted as if the old woman had dissented. "The classes have been called to the colors. Even *monsieur le curé* agreed that it was war."

"*Bien*. It is war then," her grandmother announced. "I have lived through that before. God grant we get the harvest in before the countryside is swept bare of men."

Her granddaughter laughed. "Before harvest-

time the Germans will be—" The reins sagged between her fingers and her eyes grew vague as some unseen picture rose before them. Drums, bugles, flags whipped straight in a stiff wind, men in uniform; perhaps even Jacques L'Empreur, the worthless one. Some such vision, Madame Collette knew, floated before the girl's eyes.

"We return to Hautefontaine," she asserted.
"Get on."

They drove slowly through Eplessier, slowly because the cobbled street made the carriage jounce, past the railroad station with its gay posters of Switzerland and the Alps which no one visited from this commune, past the Hotel Lion d'Or whose golden lion swinging on a sign above the entrance had long since faded to a dingy green, glimpsing within the dinner table perpetually set with eight places, never by any chance filled at the same time, past the schoolhouse whose new red brick walls and glazed yellow cornices contrasted unpleasantly with the soft gray stone of the town and thus out into the main highway which stretched, a narrowing ribbon, poplar-lined, from Compiègne to Soissons. Eplessier lay almost midway between the two, a kilometer or so nearer Soissons perhaps, and slightly back from the highway so that it huddled almost beneath the gently rounded rising hills which bounded the valley of the Aisne.

"Monsieur Dupuy says we will be in Berlin in

six weeks if the war lasts that long," Renée said after the horse had reconsidered his preliminary homeward spurt and had settled into a jog through the dust.

"Who wants to be in Berlin?" her grandmother answered. "It is only another city. Better to leave them at the border."

Her granddaughter knew that by "them" the old woman was referring to the luckless enemy. "You do not like cities, but I should like to visit many," she said. "What have I seen? Crépy, Senlis, Soissons." She spoke with fine scorn.

"It is enough," her grandmother answered. "When I was eighteen I had never been beyond Eplessier. You have also visited Compiègne."

"For the funeral of Aunt Berthe!"

"That being accomplished there was no need to go again," Madame Collette observed. "Burette's wheat is good, but ours is better." She looked at the neighboring fields with satisfaction.

"To-night there will be a celebration in the town," Renée said. "Lighted candles in all the windows, and speeches to be made from the *mairie*."

"They had better be making bandages," Madame Collette returned.

"But that comes later," Renée cried. "I want to go."

"And with whom?"

The girl lowered her head as if to keep the sun which had almost touched the rim of hills from her eyes, but for the second time that afternoon faint color replaced her pallor. "Jacques will come for me," she said.

Madame Collette was disturbed. This was not the future that she wished or visualized for Renée. The Moreaux had always been proud. They had owned their farm, the buildings and the rolling hectares, almost as long it seemed as the Aisne had flowed past their door. In Eplessier their position was of the best; only the doctor and the lawyer with their families sat farther forward in church, and the pew of Madame Moreau was but two removed from that of the Vicomte de la Eyte, who lived in the Château of Jaulzy and bowed to her with marked courtesy —a landholder like himself.

The Moreaux had accumulated some money and, in the face of many changing governments, they had held their land. In time it would all go to Renée. Jacques L'Empreur on the other hand owned no land nor did his mother. Even the café which they ran on the Place Bucot was not theirs—it was rented. Madame Collette had great respect for wine as a money-maker, but not for the way Jacques handled the business. He played billiards too much at the Lion d'Or, he laughed too much, he did not often attend mass and he was too good-looking. The

family had come from Nîmes or Arles originally; they were not even Aisne stock. Madame Collette would almost have preferred a Norman.

"You will not be annoyed when he comes?" The girl used the word *fachée* in which there is a fine distinction between annoyed and irritated, leaning toward the latter. Her voice was supplicating. "You see he has been called to the colors."

Madame Collette suddenly made up her mind. War might have its uses after all. She wished Jacques L'Empreur no harm, but if it would oblige him to take his black eyes and white teeth elsewhere for a time she would be relieved.

"You may go in for the celebration," she said graciously. "It is an occasion. Where will they send him when he goes, do you think?"

"But to Alsace of course," the girl answered simply. "To regain our lost provinces."

Madame Collette nodded. "But of course. Our lost land."

This was something she could understand, something that appealed direct to the peasant's heart of her. She had a passion for the soil—Alsace and Lorraine with their lowlands and hills, their forests and fields were part of that passion. She closed her eyes, wondering if the wheat in those lost provinces grew as tall as the wheat in her own Aisne. She dreamed while her head nodded under its black bonnet. The horse turned of his own accord from the highway

and quickened his pace. A cool mist rose from the river and spread across the green pasturage. Presently without more talking they came to their farm of Hautefontaine.

Georges, the man who lived on the farm with his wife and who cultivated it except when harvest or the spring planting required the hiring of more men, came forward to take the horse as they drove up to the door. He was about forty, thick-shouldered and immensely strong, with a round, red face and small, squinting eyes of no color. His mouth and his crooked yellow teeth were covered by a drooping, brown mustache. He was taciturn, secretive, but Madame Collette approved of him because he knew how to work.

"Georges," Renée cried, "we have declared war. It is war. Do you understand?"

For an instant his eyes glimmered up at them before they sought again his coarse, high boots, covered with clay. "*C'est ça.* I have already heard it," he admitted. Then turning, he led the horse away toward the barns.

"How did he know?" Renée asked, as they entered the house.

Her grandmother shrugged. "Possibly some one has passed this way. At any rate, it is in the air."

They sat together eating supper, at which neither the farmer nor Marie, his wife, joined them, an affectation which had been from time to time com-

mented on in Eplessier and the neighboring farms. The kitchen was enormous, ceiled in hewn oak rafters, and dim because of the single lamp with a glass base that lighted it. Madame Collette was sparing of oil. At one end of the room, the range, a black, squat affair with the name *Fleur de Lys* incongruously embossed on its oven doors, was set in a bricked-in space, and the walls on either side were flanked by shelves on which copper vessels shone red in the steady light. The chairs about the table were of a rugged farm type, and the table itself was bare of linen. Madame Collette, who did not allow her cultivator to eat with her, would never have presumed to the luxury of a cloth. There was a distinction, and she knew her place. One sacred picture, a garish lithograph of St. Joseph, and two colored calendars from an agricultural firm in Lyons hung upon the walls. Otherwise the room was bare.

They ate the stewed rabbit, warmed over from the mid-day meal, and sipped the watered red wine which Marie had placed before them, without exchanging more than a word or so. Each was considering the news of the afternoon. An uneasy exaltation filled Renée, which she could neither speak of nor define. It was as if a spell that had held her immobile for eighteen years, bound to this quiet valley and this quieter farm, had been broken. She had felt always aloof from the lives of their neighbors, the gossip one heard in the market-place, for the

austerity of her grandmother had been communicated to her also. The Moreau pride had held her from friends. Bland, drowsy summers and cold, bleak winters had drifted endlessly past her until it was nearly impossible to tell them apart, save by looking at the yearly calendars from Lyons. Now something would happen. There would at least be news from the border. She promised herself to walk daily to the town for *Le Soissonais*, the newspaper which served the whole district.

Georges, entering clumsily, interrupted her thoughts. Renée saw that he wore his Sunday suit, and that he had changed his gray shirt for one with a celluloid collar.

"What is it?" Madame Collette inquired. "The cow is not sick again?"

"I would like to go into town," he muttered into his mustache. "To mail a letter to my sister."

"But it is not the night," Madame Collette exclaimed. "Not within ten days of the night." Once each month Georges went into Eplessier to mail a letter to his sister who lived in Paris. To have the routine altered was disconcerting to the old woman. She hesitated, but Renée came to the man's rescue.

"It is also to see the celebration," she said. "Does Marie go with you?"

"I go alone," he answered, and thanked them both briefly when permission had been accorded him. Then he went out.

"It is strange," Madame Collette murmured, and moved back from the table without finishing her wine.

"It is war," Renée answered, her eyes brighter. "Even here we have war."

Jacques had come as he had promised. They were to walk in to Eplessier, but that was nothing. Neither would have thought of asking for a horse from the farm for an errand that was not a necessity. They had gone down the lane leading to the highway, leaving the old woman, who had asked the young man civilly after the health of his mother, making a tour of her home. Turning, they could see her in the semi-clearness of the late summer evening, walking slowly about the massive stone walls that surrounded the house and barns of Hautefontaine. As they watched her spare figure, hardly bent for all her age, she stooped and picked a clod of earth from the cabbage field that stretched almost to the farthest barn. She crumbled the dirt between her fingers, scattering it back on the bed with a gesture as of one sowing seed.

"She often does that," Renée said in half apology. "Grandmother is a little odd."

She moved beside him, confident, at ease, her slim young figure in its dark, cloth skirt and waist almost as tall as his own. He appeared tremendously important and grave as she looked up at him, his lips, hardly shaded by the little black mustache, un-

smiling for once. This was strange in Jacques, who was much given to laughter.

"Are you not afraid?" she asked, and then hurriedly checked herself. "But of course you are not. It is for our country."

"It is for you," he answered somberly and touched her arm. "You are my country, Renée. Is it not so?"

She grew shy before his words, understanding well enough the import of them, but gravely disapproving. "It is not enough that men fight for women. There are greater things—patriotism, liberty."

He laughed. "Liberty, equality, brotherhood! That is what the politicians say, or will. But for me, Jacques L'Empreur, I fight for the girl I love." He would have slipped his arm about her waist, but she drew away.

"You have said such things before. Grandmother tells me you are not a serious type."

"Ah, does she, indeed! Then I will prove to her that she is wrong. Wait until my first battle. Would you like a helmet? They say the enemy wear glittering ones surmounted by a spike." Quite naturally both already used the word "enemy." He tapped his chest. "I will bring you one. Then Madame will see."

"And Monique Pinceloup? You will bring her a shining helmet also?"

"Ah, Monique with her yellow skin!" He puffed his lips in scorn.

"She will be looking for you to-night."

"She will not find me. And when I am in a uniform I shall be disguised." They laughed together, skipping along through the scented darkness on the road that led to Eplessier.

There was a great illumination in the town. Candles had been placed in every window of the *mairie*, standing in even rows, their pointed flames guttering in the light breeze. There were other candles in the windows of shops on the Place Bucot, and in the rooms above where people slept. From the distance they twinkled like fireflies caught in a mesh. Flags had appeared and were hanging above many doors, and a mass of people surged back and forth between the *mairie* and the church. The mayor was going to speak, so also was Dupuy, the station agent. A rumor fluttered through the crowd that Monsieur de la Eyte himself might say a few words if, as was reported, he had left the château. Every one hoped it might be true; Jaulzy, with its well-kept park and its formal Empire drawing-rooms in the square, stone house which overlooked a lake, was held in great respect.

The young people hurriedly mingled with the crowd, receiving greetings from their friends, calling greetings in return.

"*Bon soir*, Renée, you have found a soldier!"

"*Tais-toi*, Monique. And where is your own man?"

"Good evening, Margot, does your brother go?"

"But of course. Is he not a chasseur?"

"Look! There is Monsieur Bouvet!" Renée clutched at Jacques' arm. They turned together and stared at the strange old man who moved on the outskirts of the crowd, his cane tapping before him with uncertain motion. He wore a frock coat, faded to a greenish tinge, the tails of which hung far below his knees. His nose was hooked and his bushy eyebrows were very white, which contrasted oddly with the deep tan of his wrinkled face, a tan burned there by long summers in the sun, for Monsieur Bouvet was a famous horticulturist, so one said.

He lived in a tiny house behind the cemetery of the church and mingled little with the people of Eplessier. One could see him, did one dare peep over his garden wall, working from sunrise until dusk, bending over the flowers, beside each of which stood a bamboo stake tagged with number or name. All day, moving painfully and slowly, for he was old, Monsieur Bouvet clipped, pruned and transplanted, taking a seed pod here or uprooting a whole plant there to cast it on the little fire that smoldered at the end of the path. He wrote much in a crabbed hand, and received many letters in reply, some of them with foreign stamps and

postmarks. In Eplessier his reputation was eccentric and a little sinister. Children who mocked him from a distance, fled from the stare of his reddened eyes when he spoke to them.

"The old miser," Jacques said contemptuously. "He drinks nothing. Were all like him, our café would be cut down like the grain." He used a slang expression of the South, untranslatable except as "dead broke."

In the side streets of Eplessier, many carriages and wagons from the surrounding farms and villages were drawn up while their owners hurried to hear the speeches. The mayor from his balcony was making an announcement, his rounded periods, couched in terms of admirable platitude, rolling smoothly from his tongue.

"Citizens, young men of this commune," he was saying, "the path of honor and glory lies before you. The Fatherland calls for your duty and devotion. . . ."

The crowd listened patiently for him to finish. This was almost the same speech that their mayor made each Fourteenth of July. They were waiting for Dupuy, the firebrand, whose words made the blood flow faster, whose passionate oratory was of the greatest. But Dupuy was not there.

Then the rumor spread. A special train stood on the siding at the station. Small boys sent to investi-

gate confirmed this. A quiet-voiced man passed through the crowd, speaking to a fellow here, tapping another on the shoulder there, drawing them away to one side. Thus the astounding news became known. Those who were to go must go this night.

A gasp, a wave of electric tension, broke over the people. This parting that they had visualized, to-morrow, the day after, next week, was upon them. Women went pale and, forgetting the speech which was rolling to a majestic halt, they searched through the crowd, pushing a way forward and being pushed, searching always for one man suddenly grown dear. In the side streets, the young men, self-conscious and important, were being lined up by fours, their civilian clothes contrasting oddly with the military formation.

Suddenly a cry went up: "They must have food—bread, wine and cake. Get flowers. Their first decorations." Women hurried to their homes; they beat on the shop doors. Men searched their own or neighbors' cellars in reckless enthusiasm. Before her café, Madame L'Empreur handed out bottles of red wine to every boy who passed. Tears streamed down the wrinkles of her fungus-white face until her eyes were quite blind, but she would not leave her post. Jacques was somewhere in the crowd, careless and forgetful, being very gay with one girl

or two, but his mother would not begin her search until the last bottle had been taken from the shelves of the *Café de Soleil*.

A mob quite out of hand was looting the garden of Monsieur Bouvet, trampling underfoot his rare blooms, tearing them from their stalks, while the old man shook his stick in impotent rage, pleading with them—"Not that one. Oh, not that." But they flung scornful laughter at him, filling their arms with flowers for the caps of their soldiers.

Jacques rejoined Renée where he had left her, by the corner of the church. His black eyes were wide, and flashing with excitement.

"*Peste!* It is quick," he exclaimed. "No time to get clothes or even so much as a razor. But there will be plenty of new clothes for all in the *casernes*—clothes of different cut. I have learned, however, that the train will not leave till midnight, if then. Messengers are being sent to round up others on the outskirts. Come with me, Renée, where it is quiet. I want to talk."

The steps of the church were before them, and he drew her up these. He pushed open the baize-covered door and they were inside. She followed him obediently without speaking. It seemed strange to be in the church that was never entered save on Sundays or for funerals. A draft of chill, damp air struck them, and the girl shivered, drawing closer to him. He took her hands.

"Listen," he said urgently. "I leave to-night, now. Had there been more time, I would have spoken again of what I began to say on the road from Hautefontaine. I would have spoken first to Madame Moreau, as is proper; my mother would have called on her, but it is too late for that. Renée, before I go, will you promise to marry me, when I come back?"

"You can not speak of such a thing here," she whispered, and glanced toward the altar where a single light glimmered like a ruby eye.

"This is the place to speak of sacred things," he answered sternly.

She remained silent, twisting her hands which he had freed, in indecision. A conflict of warnings, adverse reasons and emotions broke like tumbled waves against her. Jacques L'Empreur was wild—there had been stories. He was poor—there would be no patrimony when madame his mother died. He was Arlesian, not of the Aisne. For a moment, the arguments of her grandmother swayed her, then they were lost as she looked at him. Outside, some one had lighted a bonfire in the square. The reflection of the flames came through the colored glasses of the window, throwing pools of violet, rose and green on the stone floor. The reflection glimmered back into the church until the gold-leaf on a hidden statue glowed. Jacques' face was white, the features regular like marble; his black hair

swept low on his forehead; his eyes had an inner fire. There was no handsomer lover from Soissons to Compiègne, no, not even as far back as Senlis itself, was there one so handsome. Many other girls had desired him.

“Oh, Virgin, help me,” Renée breathed and looked toward the farthest corner of the church, where the shrine of the Madonna was concealed in gloom. But no miracle happened there.

“You do not care for me; you never did,” he said slowly, bitterly.

“It is only that I am not sure,” she answered, hesitating.

The boy was quick to hear the yielding in her voice. “Renée, for the love of God, is it so much to ask?” he cried. “There will be no better husband in all the commune, I promise you. I will adore you always. I have laughed too much, I have played too much, but it will not be so again. I go away to-night. But with your word, I can go happy. Next week of course I may be dead.”

He moved and at once the whiteness of his forehead became incarnadined, a crimson bloody stain in the light from the window. To the girl staring at him, it was as if a portent had been sounded, a warning of the tragedy which lay over them while they made it a fête. Her voice broke.

“My dear,” she whispered, “dear Jacques. If it would be a comfort to you—”

With an exultant cry, he caught her to him. His hands were upon her shoulders, drawing her close. He was kissing her forehead, her cheeks, her mouth. She stood there, quiet and contained, feeling nothing, unwarmed by his kisses, only, through her pity for him, wondering why she could be so calm. Then he dropped to his knees, his arms embracing her knees, while he hid his face in her relaxed hands.

Presently he rose and slipped his arm about her waist, drawing her to the door of the church. He dipped his finger into the font of holy water and offered it to her. "You will wait for me, Renée?" he whispered. "Promise that you will wait."

She touched his outstretched finger, her head bent in acquiescence, and made the sign of the cross upon her breast. It was as if she had sworn under the seal of sacrament.

Outside, the square had been reduced to a more orderly confusion. People still hurried to and fro, but they hurried with a purpose. A grim determination to do something, anything, had replaced the gay hysteria of Eplessier. Women ran from houses with valises and bundles hastily wrapped. There was a constant clamor of voices.

"Who has seen Henri Ruel? Where is Ruel? I have warm socks for him here and some francs. One needs money."

"Where does the train go? I hear to Amiens."

"No, Paris."

"It is Amiens, I tell you. The *corps d'armée* for this department is there, but it will delay for some time at Soissons."

"Very well, then I will follow it to Soissons, too."

Jacques, with Renée clinging to his arm, came upon old Madame L'Empreur pressing blindly through the crowd in spite of her lame legs, clutching a bundle while she sniveled.

"But, mamma," the young man cried, "you should be at the Soleil."

She patted his cheek, smiling through her tears. "Your old mother can still walk if necessary. I thought you had gone. Look here, my little one, these are some clean shirts and a new cheese." She turned the bundle doubtfully. "But I am afraid the cheese has become mixed with the shirts. Some one bumped against me."

"*Ça va*," he said gravely. "What could be sweeter in one's shirts than the fragrance of your cheese?"

He turned to Renée. "Mamma, Renée is to be my wife when this is over," he said simply. "It will make me fight harder."

Madame L'Empreur gave a little cry and then checked herself. Although her prayers and votive candles had been answered at last, it would not do to be over-eager before the girl who was to be her daughter-in-law.

"There is no finer boy in France," she pronounced, "and you, my dear, are a fine girl, too."

She drew her down in order that she might kiss her on both cheeks, the while she speculated discreetly on the acres of wheat, the cattle and the rich cabbages of Hautefontaine.

An hour later, Renée was on her way home alone. The strange officer who had come with the train had made an announcement. No wheel should move until to-morrow at least, he promised. There would be ample time for partings then, but for to-night those who were called must sleep in the train.

She had escaped at last, promising to come in to Eplessier at dawn. If those mobilized were no longer there, she could at least write. Jacques held her to him. "It will not be for long," he said, his voice thick. "Good night, Renée, my heart."

A distant storm was playing over the plains far beyond Tartiers, pale flares of lightning weaving through the sky. "It might be cannon," Renée thought, who had never heard a gun. Some rain-drops fell but she did not quicken her pace. Her resistance was spent, her body numb.

"But it was a miracle," she said again and again, monotonously, of the red light that had fallen for a moment on Jacques L'Empreur's face. "A miracle sent me by the Virgin to show me what to do."

Her grandmother met her at the door of Hautefontaine, a candle held high. Her sharp eyes clung to the girl's face, examining it avidly, and then dropped away. "I knew it had happened," she an-

nounced. "The cow is sick again, and Georges has not returned."

Renée did not answer.

"Poor little fool," Madame Collette said more gently. "And after all, you do not care!"

"It was a miracle," Renée muttered.

"Miracles," returned Madame Collette from the depths of her wisdom, "do not happen on the Aisne."

But the train had gone after all, slipping away in the night, without the tooting of tin whistles which would ordinarily have characterized such a departure. Eplessier sank from its high hysteria into a troubled calm. It was waiting for victories, and in the meanwhile there was work to be done. But the victories, after a few early unconfirmed rumors, were sadly lacking; there was, in fact, no news at all. Even *Le Soissonais*, for which Renée walked daily into the town, was inadequate. It contained nothing save cautiously worded *communiqués* declaring that all was well, and lists of courageous youths who had been called from the district. Weeks passed.

Then the phlegmatic quiet of the townspeople was disturbed. Frantic reports followed one another within the hour. They were discussed, passed on, tossed about in the midst of a sullen and ever-

growing excitement. There had been a great battle somewhere.

"Another of our fortresses has been lost!" cried Dupuy, who had changed from the fire-eating patriot to an extreme pessimist.

"But that is impossible," answered the man to whom he was talking. "It is said that the German shells do not explode."

"It is ours that do not explode. Did they not take Liège and have they not battered a way through Belgium?" There was no retort to this. They had.

Then the news became definite. There had been a battle at Guise, no one knew exactly when, days or weeks before. But those who lost men had been notified. Margot's brother, the chasseur, had been killed, and the cousin of Monique Pinceloup. There were other losses, in the town and on the farms—from Maladrerie, from Hors, from Les Loupettes, the news of them filtered in. Eplessier was stunned; then the sullen excitement that had held it tense, burst in a great bubble of frenzied rage.

"How is it that this commune has suffered such losses?" women demanded of one another in shops and on the street corners. In the fields men echoed it. "Ten men have been killed from this corner of the Aisne alone. Ten men!" That story spread; it was fifteen, and then thirty—one hundred. The Government had not dared report all the losses. Further casualties would be announced from the Minis-

try of War. People cowered, not knowing where the next blow would fall.

All day their passion was fed by vagrant rumors which, like dark, evil birds, winged their way from group to group, casting a shadow upon them. By nightfall the stories had crystallized. No one knew where the final form had been conceived, but it was a fact. There was a spy in Eplessier. It was because of him that these losses had fallen on them.

Toward nine o'clock, a group formed on the far side of the church. It was dark and their coat collars were turned up, their caps pulled down. One who appeared to be the leader, harangued them for a time, and then they moved off to the house of Monsieur Bouvet. He who had spoken to the others stepped forward and rapped upon the door. There was no answer, and there were no lights in the windows. He rapped again and then louder, beating a tattoo with both fists which boomed against the wood.

"The bird has flown," said one of the men.

Gone! That gripped them with apprehension and anger. Three men shoved forward and thrust their shoulders against the door. They grunted deep in their throats and pushed. There was a rending noise, the squeal of breaking hinges, and the door swung back. They crowded into the little room.

It was quite dark, hardly lighted by the pallid moon which hung low in the sky, and for a mo-

ment they were confused, turning instinctively to the man who offered leadership. Then from a room beyond came the glimmer of a candle. Old man Bouvet appeared, the light in his hand thrust forward.

He was an inconsequential, a ridiculous figure, dressed in one garment, a nightshirt that clung about his thin shanks. His reddened eyes blinked at them uncomprehendingly. The leader spoke.

"Monsieur, you have of course heard of our losses."

"He denies it!" cried one in the background.

The leader motioned them to silence. "Is it not true that you have communicated with Germans? We are a committee to ask you that. Answer me!"

Monsieur Bouvet looked at them. They were unknown to him—heavy-shouldered, hairy men who were laborers on the farms, perhaps. He placed the candle on the table and shivered.

"Messieurs, what is it that you wish?" he asked, his voice quavering. "I do not understand."

The leading man caught him by the shoulder and wrenched him round until they stared into each other's faces. Monsieur Bouvet recognized him now—a man he had never liked.

"We have means to make you understand!" he cried. "Is it not true that you have given information to Germans?"

A flash of comprehension showed in the eyes of

the startled old man. For a moment his lips twitched into a dry little smile beneath his hooked nose. "To the best of my ability I have," he declared. "But one can not tell them much."

A growl rose in the bearded throats of the men; they pressed foward until they surrounded the ridiculous little figure by the table. Several caught his arms, but he thrust them off. "Messieurs," he said with dignity, "I have answered your question. Now go. You smell of cognac."

"Who is it you have given information to?"

"Von Helmholtz of Heidelberg, Stuck of— Messieurs, you do not think this is information about the war! I speak of flowers."

"We'll see for ourselves." They pushed him aside and turned to an old filing cabinet in one corner. But at that hostile move, the horticulturist became as one possessed. He sprang at them, flinging his slight weight against their heavy bodies, striking at their faces and chests with futile fists, shrilling imprecations and commands. A man seized him bodily about the waist and threw him across the room. He rose and tottered back, his hands outstretched, but they pushed him off again. Another had pulled out a drawer of the cabinet which toppled to the floor, spilling a mass of card indexes, tabulated envelopes and letters.

Then madness seized them. Books were dragged from shelves; their pages were torn and scattered.

Chairs were overturned, a chest was looted. They were stuffing their pockets with letters and documents while the old man swayed about the room, uttering squeals of agony. It had taken only a few minutes and then they were done.

"Come on," the leader said. "We have made a coup this night."

Monsieur Bouvet sprang at him. "Give me my papers," he cried. "My letters and my papers."

The leader thrust him aside so roughly that he went tottering across the floor and into a walnut *armoire* that rose to the ceiling. The old man sagged down and lay sprawled on his side. Above the right temple, a streak of blood formed and began to flow.

An hour later Dupuy, the station agent, presented himself at the doctor's house on the rue de Bec, his pointed face paler than ever. "Monsieur, it is known that we have had heavy losses in this commune, and one has reason to suspect the work of spies," he said.

The doctor nodded and smiled into his beard. They were like children, the people of this parish. Simple, but good.

"It seems that old man Bouvet, who lives by the church, has been suspected," Dupuy continued cautiously. "One remembers what a fuss he made with his flowers the night our soldiers left, and it is also known that he receives many letters from abroad."

"Sit down," said the doctor. "What of it? In my youth I, too, received letters from abroad."

But Dupuy would not be seated. He licked his lips nervously. "But it is different with you, Monsieur—a doctor." He spoke with respect. "Bouvet is only a gardener. I have here some papers which have come into my hands belonging to him—"

"What have you been doing?" asked the doctor sharply.

"Nothing that I am ashamed of," Dupuy declared. "One has a right to protect one's country and one's friends in time of war. I am but asking you to look these letters over. Many are in German which I can not read, but you who have studied there—"

"Ah, yes," said the doctor. "In my youth—" He lost himself for some moments in memories of the university. "Well, there may be something to it," he continued. "Leave the letters, Dupuy, and I will read them. But not to-night. I have a pressing call to make, and also I have forgotten much German."

He turned the bundle in his hand before laying it on the table. A slip of paper fluttered to the floor. The doctor picked it up.

"But this is in French," he exclaimed. Then he read the fine, crabbed writing: "If it is successful when created, the new black rose with the crimson heart shall be called 'Soldier of France.' I will let

you know," he said curtly aloud, and dismissed the waiting man.

Shortly after, the doctor drove through the town on his call. All Eplessier lay in darkness except the house of Monsieur Bouvet, from whose windows a faint light shone. The doctor would have stopped, but there might be something in what Dupuy had said, and his case was pressing. On a farm, lay a woman who had begun the labor of childbirth.

That night the war came to Eplessier. As the advance swept nearer, it had hummed high overhead, but its destination had been towns of importance. The villages and hamlets had cowered, their windows blanketed, in some security. But to-night it was different. No court of inquiry could determine why this thing had happened, and there was no court. Each one might select his own theory — malice, or whim, an extra bomb. Dr. Reynard believed it had been the patch of pale light shining out over a tumbled garden.

They had run out, the townsfolk, at that one terrific crash, with lanterns, for they were not yet wise in the ways of war; but fortunately no other aviators followed. There was nothing they could do and it was not until next morning that the full extent of the damage could be estimated.

One end of the little house had been completely wrecked. The salon alone was almost untouched.

A filing cabinet had been blown over by the blast, a chest had been tossed to one side. That was all, unless one mentioned old man Bouvet, who lay there in a nightgown that looked strangely like a shroud. His body was unmarred, Dr. Reynard found, except for the right temple on which was a small, deep cut, but that had caused his death. The doctor, weary with bringing a life into the world to replace the one that had gone, pondered somewhat on the power of flying metal in contact with a vital spot.

There was great sympathy in Eplessier for Monsieur Bouvet. One recalled that he had the right to inscribe letters after his name. The postmaster spoke of his large mail with pride. Evidently the town had contained a famous man, had they but known it. The suggestion made only yesterday, that he was a spy, was laughed aside uneasily or ignored. An unknown German aviator, flying a Gotha plane, had settled that. This blood-letting had lowered the fever of the town.

Late in the afternoon, Dr. Reynard met Dupuy. The latter had changed much in twelve hours. His pointed face was peaked, and an unhealthy yellow. His prominent eyes had glazed with a look of anxious interrogation. He was fifty years old and exempt, but he wished that he were twenty and in the lines. Never had he yearned so for his lost youth.

The doctor stood before him. Dupuy also stood

still. His eyes were beseeching to be told that this was not all a mistake, but Dr. Reynard did not look at his eyes.

"Monsieur," he said formally, "I have examined the papers you were good enough to hand me last night. There is only one that would be of interest to you. I have it here." He offered a folded slip of paper and walked on.

Dupuy read it: "If it is successful when created, the new black rose with the crimson heart shall be called 'Soldier of France.' "

The station agent nodded several times, as if at a piece of news which he had anticipated, then he continued on his way.

But the death of Professor Bouvet was not to be more than a day's sensation in Eplessier before it was replaced by another. Toward nightfall, the astounding, the hardly credible report spread. In his little grilled room at the station, Dupuy, the patriot and the orator, had shot himself.

Quiet had again fallen on Eplessier. It is not to be thought that the death of Monsieur Bouvet and the shot that killed Dupuy had no echo in the hearts of their neighbors. Indeed, by some peculiar method which had no connection with direct speech, the story was pretty generally understood, and accurately, and there was at least one result traceable to it, but that came later.

In the meanwhile, the continued advance of the enemy had thrown even the battle at Guise into obscurity and the first losses there were evaluated at their proper proportion. Only by those affected in the town and on the farms—Hors and Les Loupettes—was it remembered.

At Hautefontaine life continued on the surface as it had always been, but even here there was a difference. Renée had a new duty each night and morning in saying prayers for the safety of Jacques L'Empreur. She implored steadfastly both the Virgin and her patron saint for his protection against bullets and especially bombs, with which she had had the one vicarious experience, but she prayed with a tranquil heart, and without much anxiety.

She ascribed this calm to her confidence in the mercy of heaven, but Madame Collette, watching her, was convinced that her granddaughter was not in love. Since she was a woman of honor, she accepted the betrothal, and especially when she learned where it had taken place, to her horror, and she even went so far as to call on Madame L'Empreur, with whom she dickered shrewdly as to the *dot* which should go with Renée, pointing out that in their station of life, it was not obligatory, but she did it with contentment, aware that the war might end any day a situation little to her liking.

Renée had more than her prayers to occupy her,

for suddenly Marie left. It was Georges who announced her departure.

"She goes to take care of my sister who is ill in Paris," he said, twisting as usual his cap in work-roughened fingers.

"But that is impossible," Madame Collette declared indignantly. "How will we manage here?"

"My sister is ill and so Marie will leave," he stated again stolidly.

As if to confirm this, Marie herself appeared. She was a large woman, with coarse black hair, who wore usually a smock and wooden shoes. Now she had replaced the smock with a dark, bombazine dress that compressed her ample figure painfully, and the wooden shoes had been replaced by leather ones with elastic sides. She carried her belongings in a straw bag. This last convinced her mistress.

"It is of an inconvenience hardly to be borne," Madame Collette complained. "However, harness a horse and take her in."

"She can walk," Georges answered indifferently.

Marie kissed Renée without any show of emotion, shook hands with Madame Collette and, with the briefest word to her husband, set out on the road to Eplessier, leaving the farm where she had lived for five years. It was only later that they realized she had said nothing about coming back.

It was some days later that Georges came to

Renée in the cow-barn where she was washing milk pails. He stood there, looking down at her, hesitating for words, and as she looked up at his red face and pale, squinting eyes, she thought that he looked more than usually dull-witted.

"Mademoiselle Renée," he said at last. "It might be well for you to leave Hautefontaine as Marie has done."

"Why?" she asked in astonishment.

He began placing the pails she had scoured on a shelf. "The enemy continues to approach," he told her. "A lonely farm is hardly the place for a young girl. In Paris now, or further south—" He spat into manure outside the door.

Renée laughed. "They will not get even so far as Eplessier. In any case, I will remain." This was for a secret reason of her own. Already soldiers were passing through the town, and she expected each day to see Jacques. It did not occur to her that his division might be fighting far from his home, and also she wanted to see him. In a jaunty uniform, with its peaked cap, her heart might stir with the emotion which had been so lacking. That was beginning to disturb her.

Later she repeated to her grandmother the conversation with Georges. At once Madame Collette sent for him. The continued advance of the enemy, swallowing farms, communes and whole provinces as they approached, had badly shaken her. Again

her thoughts turned back to the days of 1870 and that relentless rush which was being repeated. She could recall, as if the list was before her eyes, each detail of the damage done to Hautefontaine and the cost thereof.

"What is this you say?" she demanded of Georges when he appeared. "Have not proclamations been posted, telling us to remain tranquil—that there is no danger?"

"Well, there are rumors," he answered sullenly. "One hears that the Germans are but two days' march away. What is a proclamation? Something printed on a slip of paper."

"Who told you that rumor?" Madame Collette demanded. "I was in the town yesterday, and heard nothing."

But he remained silent, either because he did not know, or because, as ever, he was unwilling to waste words. Had he but said, "Old man Ruel told me," or "Le Clerc at the Lion d'Or," she would have reproved him sharply as an idler and a gossip. But there was in his silence something which set her usually steady nerves to quivering. They failed her at a hint of the unknown.

Her face grew ashen, and her black eyes above sallow pouches of skin stared at him in terror. "You *have* heard something then," she shrilled, and clutched his sleeve. "Oh, Blessed Mother, and the harvest not off the ground!"

Renée stared at her grandmother. Only once or twice before had she seen the old woman excited like this, her contained spirit so broken.

"It would be folly to gather it in for them then," she observed.

"They shall not have it!" Madame Collette cried. "Not one cabbage, not one sheaf of wheat from Hautefontaine. We will go armed to the fields. We will fight. I shall appeal to the mayor for a guard."

Renée turned to Georges. "See the result of your chattering tongue," she whispered reproachfully. "Tell her it is not true, or she will give herself a fever."

He nodded. "Madame, I think if the Germans do come that they will not touch Hautefontaine," he said respectfully. "I think you will find that this farm is safe." Then without waiting to be questioned further, he turned and went back to the barns.

It was not exactly what she had asked him to say, Renée reflected, but it had at least an effect. Madame Collette was temporarily calmed, although she insisted on driving in to Eplessier. There were those who would advise her. By the time she had told her story to Dr. Reynard, whom they had chanced to meet, her fears were sufficiently dispelled for her to laugh at them.

"It was foolish of course, but I am old and not so courageous as formerly," she said. "We are quite

safe; one says that Joffre has six divisions well placed between us and the enemy."

The doctor hardly smiled his agreement with her. "What your man said interests me," he said thoughtfully. "Georges, is that his name? Even as a matter of reassurance, it seemed a curious thing to say—that Hautefontaine would not be touched. There *are* farms that remain untouched, you know—" He hesitated. "Well, I should not like to start another affair like that of Monsieur Bouvet and our poor hot-headed Dupuy. You say his wife is gone. Let us see exactly when they received this letter about the sick sister."

Interested, but hardly understanding, the two women drove slowly to the *bureau de poste* while the doctor walked beside them. The postmaster was not there, but his wife was, a plump and loquacious woman who knew everything.

"But no!" she exclaimed. "I know well who he is—Georges Denain. There have been letters for him, but not for three weeks. Possibly a telegram on the date you mention, but I think I would have known that, too." The doctor agreed with her. She knew of everything that happened in the village.

"It is a matter of no importance," he assured her, hoping to allay the curiosity rising in her eyes. "A letter which did not arrive from his sister who is sick."

"I think I will return to Hautefontaine with

you," he said when he stood beside the carriage again. "Renée can sit on my knees; she is but a child after all, in spite of this unexpected lover who fights for us." He winked a trifle maliciously at the old woman, understanding well her discontent.

"Let us drive through the park at Jaulzy," he suggested when he had squeezed his bulk between them. "It is shorter and Monsieur le Vicomte will not mind."

They saw nothing of the Vicomte de la Eyte or his family, as they took the winding road through the estate which led again to the main highway, but as they came to a spot which permitted a clearer view of the château, they saw a farm wagon standing before the door of Jaulzy, being loaded with what appeared to be, through the screen of leaves, furniture and trunks.

"Our neighbor is off for a little visit," said the doctor thoughtfully. They drove on in silence.

There was a strange air about Hautefontaine as they approached it. The house stood there, quite as they had left it, gray and solid, surrounded in part by a wall of great thickness which enclosed the courtyard. The sinking sun struck across its tiled roof and turned the windows facing west to glittering squares of light. From the barns came the uneasy lowing of a cow. Nothing was changed, and yet the two women sensed at once a subtle difference. There was about the place a gentle

melancholy, the desolation that comes with abandonment. Perhaps the doctor did not notice it; at any rate, he did not speak.

They alighted and went into the long low room which ran the depth of the house. Madame Collette raised her voice in a call; it echoed through the barely furnished rooms but there was no reply, save the whirring of a pigeon flying from the rooftree to a barn.

"He might be there," Renée said. "With the cattle." She would have gone out, but her grandmother stayed her.

"I will bring him in," she said, and imagined her voice was confident, but to the ears of the other two, it shook. Beside the door there hung a bell, brass, with a brazen tongue, which was used to call the workers from the fields. The old woman stepped forward and pulled the cord that hung from it. The harsh clamor burst out over the countryside, but no one came. She rang it again, and there was no answer.

The doctor had run in the direction of the cabbage field. His knees felt strangely weak, and he muttered in his beard. He was too old to run, he thought. Vagrant thoughts came to him of symptoms of the heart, symptoms which he had, but still he ran. Renée was searching through the barns. Behind them the bell clanged in swaying strokes as if the old woman supported herself by the cord.

They came together again at last in the big room, knowing, as they looked at each other with dazed eyes, that the man was gone. The doctor took audible command, trying to bring to the situation some vestige of his scientific calm.

"Well, Madame Collette," he said, "you have lost a farmhand. And we—Eplessier, that is, has lost"—he hesitated—"a spy." He brought the words out finally as if they tasted ill in his mouth. "Our friend Dupuy was not so far wrong after all, only he shot his arrow at another target. The *affaire* Bouvet was not quite in vain, for probably your man saw the handwriting on the wall, or better shall we say, he has sensed the temper of the Aisne. What had happened to another could well happen to him, and so he has gone—the spy!"

He had had irrefutable proof. On the door of a barn, scrawled in chalk, were the words "Gute leute. Nicht zu plündern."

Madame Collette sat down suddenly. "Those deaths, then," she exclaimed, her voice sick. "They can be laid to Hautefontaine."

"Ah, no," Doctor Reynard answered. "Whatever his purpose was, it was not that. They do not care—" He broke off. It had been his intention to say that the Germans did not kill men from the Aisne in preference to those from the Surmelin or the Marne, but these natives would not understand

that. It was their valley, the bravest and the best, against the enemy world.

"You are not to distress yourself," he continued. "What has been done was done weeks, perhaps years ago. Well, I must go back to the town. There will be telegrams to send, and reports to make. The man, I fear, has gone, but it might be possible to trace his wife."

He accepted the offer of their carriage still standing before the door, and promised to send it back by a boy. Madame Collette hardly sought to detain him with her thanks. She sat, her head bent forward, her hands clenched upon her knees.

Not until the crunching wheels on the dry road had faded into silence, did she move. Then she sprang up. Spots of color burned in her gray face. "I would not speak while he was here," she cried. "Eplessier shall not know of our loss."

She took the girl by the arm and drew her into the kitchen. She swung open the door of the old oven set in brick, which stood beside the range. "Put your hand in there," she commanded. "What do you feel?"

Wondering, Renée obeyed. "A loose brick."

"Take it out. And now?"

The girl shivered, and would have withdrawn her hand as it came in contact with something. "Do not be afraid," said her grandmother. "It is a stocking, nothing more."

Renée held it before her—a long, shapeless stocking, knitted of coarse, gray wool.

"It is empty," said Madame Collette. Then her voice broke in an anguished wail. "But this morning it contained five thousand francs!"

It was late that night before Renée slept. A turmoil of thoughts was seething through her brain. Georges, whom she had thought so stupid and trustful, a spy! Dully, year after year, he had plowed, planted and reaped, and all that while, his unimportant little reports, a bit of gossip here, a few haphazard figures there, were being sent to some intelligence somewhere, to be pieced into a deadly whole. And her grandmother, who had kept a fortune in the house so secretly. What did she, Renée, know? What had she ever known? Nothing, she decided in humiliation, remembering that once she had thought Eplessier dull, had complained because she had never been farther away than Compiègne in one direction and Senlis in another.

She began to think of Jacques L'Empreur, wondering if he would marry her now her *dot* was gone. She put that thought from her as evil and began to pray. After a time she grew sleepy. Once she thought she heard her grandmother move in the room at the end of the hall, but it might have been only a board creaking in the old house. It did not sound again and presently she slept.

Madame Collette did not put on her shoes until

she was outside the house. There was no moon, but it was not dark. Stars, clustered thickly, gave her enough light so that she could avoid the stones that lay in her path. A night bird rustled in a thicket near her, but she did not hear it; the scent of some trailing vine hung heavy in the air, but she did not smell that. There was a long journey before her, three kilometers or so, and she sighed for she was no longer young.

Her mind was concentrated on the hill, dim on the skyline, known as *Maison Rouge* because of the large and curiously colored stone which stood at the summit—a stone, square-shaped like a small farmhouse, and not gray in color like all the other stones thereabouts, but of a dull-veined pinkish shade. It was a landmark. Beneath it was the opening to the quarry which had for many years supplied building stone for the Aisne houses. Madame Collette had not been to it for years; she hoped the path leading there was still clear. Walking slowly, because the night was before her, she started out.

It was an hour before dawn when she stretched herself again on her bed. At dawn she and Renée were awakened. Horses were neighing, hooves were clattering on the stone. Peering from a window, drawn together by sudden fear, Renée and her grandmother saw that the yard was filled with French chasseurs.

With the characteristic absorption of men, Ma-

dame Collette thought, the soldiers demanded food first, and wine, before they would talk. Their horses were caked with dried mud to the flanks, and were badly winded. The men themselves swayed in the saddles while they munched the bread and cheese the women brought them. Their faces were grim and gray, their eyes reddened. Renée stood timidly near, offering glasses of the sharp wine of the country which they drank in great gulps.

"Have you any news of Jacques L'Empreur?" she asked and gave the number of his division and regiment. And when they did not know—"Have you ever heard of Eugene Pinceloup? He was a chasseur." But they were Normans from the direction of Rouen and knew nothing of her friends.

"There has been a battle," said one of the men, a *sous-officier*, "and we are in retreat." He stated it baldly as if this was an every-day occurrence. "This farm should be evacuated at once, Mademoiselle. The sooner the better because you will be obliged to walk. We are taking what horses you have."

One of the men had gone in the direction of the stables. Madame Collette broke into frantic objections, but the young man silenced her wearily. "It is to be regretted," he observed, "but it is war. Here is a requisition which is my authority. Later it can be redeemed for the value of the beasts." He scribbled on a slip of paper and handed it to her.

When the chasseurs had clattered off down the

highway in a cloud of flying dust the two women looked at each other. "Shall we go?" Madame Collette whispered, her lips white.

Renée glanced apprehensively at the distant hills just colored by the rising sun. Suddenly they had grown sinister. "It is better to obey," she answered.

They hurried their preparations which were slight since there was little they could carry. Renée ran to the barn. "I shall let the cows into the lower lot," she called, "otherwise they would starve in their stalls."

They started at last, burdened with a few clothes, and took the road to Jaulzy. It might be, Renée said hopefully, that Monsieur le Vicomte would have room at least for her grandmother in one of his carriages. They turned at the foot of the lane to look at the house. Hautefontaine lay there in the full dark foliage of late summer, solid, something tangible to live by, impregnable it seemed. Madame Collette was weeping, but the girl was swept by a flame of excitement. This was living at last.

The château at Jaulzy was deserted, its green shuttered blinds closed. Not even the old gardener lingered by the lower pond where his formal garden grew, but the swans still sailed over the surface of the water, arching their beautiful necks, indifferent and serene.

Not since war had been declared was Eplessier in such a turmoil. People belched from every house,

carrying bags, bundles, and wheeling barrows. Many had already gone. Some called greetings to their friends, hysterical comment or filled with sober pain.

"Have no fear, we will be back," men cried as if they expected to be contradicted. The women said nothing, busy with the children who clung to their skirts. Renée and her grandmother followed the crowd.

From every farm and hamlet the trudging throng was swelled. Reluctant cattle and sheep were forced into the highway from pastures. Dust arose in blinding, stinging clouds and the stench became intolerable. The sun rose higher and the refugees suffered from thirst. Everyone carried something, from bird cages to silk hats, but few had thought to bring water or wine. A confusion of rumor, warning and advice ran through the crowd.

"Ho, there, Papon, where are we going?"

"Beyond Crépy there will be safety."

"I hear we are going to Nanteuil-le-Haudouin."

"No, not that! One says that Nanteuil has been cut off from the north."

"Perhaps to Paris itself! But who could walk to Paris!"

Renée walked on beside her grandmother. The fine exaltation had left her and she began to be afraid. The old woman was no longer weeping; now

her black eyes glittered and she often lagged, looking behind. They no longer spoke except in monosyllables, and even these died at last.

Toward noon Renée roused from the daze which held her to a realization that her grandmother was no longer by her side. The girl stepped to the ditch and waited. Possibly her grandmother had dropped back to speak to Madame L'Empreur who was being carried by two panting farmhands in an easy chair somewhere in the rear, but although she waited for fifteen minutes and then more the old woman did not come.

At last the girl started slowly back, pushing her way against the throng as a swimmer breasts the tide. To each person that she knew and to many who were strange she asked the same question, "Have you seen Madame Moreau?" "Have you seen a tall, old woman, Monsieur?" But no one could recall having seen Madame Collette.

At last toward mid-afternoon, with the refugees growing less, she found a man hobbling on a wooden leg who had news. "Of a certainty," he cried. "Very thin like a knife she was, and with black eyes."

"Yes, yes," Renée answered. "It is she. Where has she gone, Monsieur?" She was exhausted by her search, and fighting the panic that welled up into her throat.

"She said she was going to Hautefontaine. It must be at the end of the country. Me, I do not know it," the man answered.

A cry burst from Renée. Before her eyes the hot, white road turned black; blindly she plunged on again. "I must go back! I must go back!" she said but no one seemed to understand. Two men caught her arms in kind, firm hands. She tried to thrust them off. There were little exclamations of pity—a woman was wiping her face with a handkerchief. The heat rose up in dust-dry waves choking her throat when she tried to speak. They were leading her away again, ignoring what she said, soothing her with vague words.

At last she made them know that she must go back. They appealed to some soldiers who were pushing their way up in the direction that the refugees had come, skirting through the fields.

"Do not be alarmed, Mademoiselle," one of them said. "She will rejoin you soon. They will not let her through the lines." The column moved on again, for what was one woman and her troubles?

At dusk the tired wanderers halted to rest. Renée still wept. The woman who had offered her a handkerchief and who still remained near spoke to her reprovingly. "Look," she said, "you can not go back now."

Renée turned. A black cloud, growing in volume, had hung on the horizon all afternoon. Now, with

nightfall, it had turned a dim red, a somber glow hidden by rolling smoke. "They are burning," said the woman, her voice shaking. "It is Senlis that burns."

Renée dropped her head in her hands. The enemy were burning Senlis, and Senlis was far this side of Hautefontaine.

PART TWO

ON one side of the glade which ran through the forest stood a house, so weathered and eroded that the stones of it might have been quarried a thousand years ago. On the other side of the glade stood another house, its boarded walls and tar-paper roof so new that it might have been built last Friday. A road ran between the two, once turf-covered but now muddy and rutted owing to much heavy traffic that had passed that way. A few soldiers in blue uniforms and peaked caps poked aimlessly in the underbrush by the roadside with the futile manner of soldiers unemployed. The underbrush was thicker and there was more dead wood scattered about than would ever have been allowed in the days when the Vicomte de la Eyte had last hunted there. But that had been a full three and a half years ago and the vicomte was no longer in residence at Jaulzy, his château, on the outskirts of the woods. The soldiers were undisturbed by the disorder.

They hardly turned to look at the ambulance which drew up at the door of the wooden house.

Many ambulances came through the forest, often full, and the sight was not now one of interest. This one was painted olive-drab and from the dried mud caked on it had come a long way. The soldier who had driven it looked earnestly at the triangle painted above the only door to the house, and then entered. He plunged his hand into a pocket and withdrew it empty.

"I'll try for a hand-out anyway," he thought. "If it's a French *copé* I'll get it, if it's an American-run Y I'll have to pay."

Inside the building wooden benches were set at intervals the length of the room and there was a table on which were scattered a few mutilated copies of *Le Sourire*, *La Vie Parisienne* and *La Bayonette*.

"It's French," the soldier told himself with relief. "They wouldn't allow those in any decently run American Y."

But when he approached the counter at the end of the room he was less sure. Here were displayed cartons of cigarettes which he knew well. They were manufactured for the American Army and were full of hay. There was also chocolate of the peculiarly sandy type which while made in France was sold exclusively to the guests from overseas, so rumor said. At any rate it was rarely seen in the possession of French soldiers who knew food values.

On one of the benches near the counter sat an old

woman who polished tin cups by the simple expedient of spitting on her apron and then rubbing the cup with it. A pail of water stood near by, but this was not being utilized. To her the soldier addressed himself.

"*C'est un coöperative, ne c'est pas, Madame?*" he asked politely.

Without answering him directly she jerked one hand in the direction of a small room behind the counter and continued her work. The soldier waited. The seconds dragged. Nothing happened.

"Come on," he cried aloud in his irritation. "Let's get a little action."

At once the door opened and a girl came out. She wore a uniform not readily identifiable, but it was apparent that she was not French. Her face had been modeled by a generous hand. The brow was wide, but the face itself tapered to the delicate chin, which was saved from being pointed by a slight cleft in it. Her eyes were very far apart and of an indescribable color which might have been gray until the afternoon sun striking through a window caught them, and in their depths were reflected green lights, or blue. The soldier did not know which. They reminded him, he thought in a flash that was instantly forgotten, of something he had seen on his one day in Paris—a string of pale, beautiful stones, rain-washed, that reflected any color near them. He was conscious dimly that her nose

was not pinched and that the nostrils were sensitive, but not then nor afterward could he have described her mouth or the color of her hair. There might have been copper in it, but she was standing now full in the light from the sinking sun, and his eyes were dazzled too.

She spoke to him and he took off his cap.

“You wanted something?” she asked. There was about her voice a quality that disturbed him. It was crisp and clear, yet gracious. One could hardly call it friendly for it was too impersonal. At the sound of it his eyes grew troubled and he bent his head as if listening to a long-lost echo. Then that illusion passed too.

“I’d like to buy—that is I thought—” He stopped, remembering that he had no money. The girl did not hear him. She had seen the old woman.

“Margot!” she cried, horrified. “*Veux tu dé-sister!*”

Reluctantly, mumbling to herself, the old woman took the pile of cups she had cleaned and plunged them into the pail of water. Then she stirred them distastefully with her hand.

“I think she’s half-witted,” said the girl. “I never can get her to clean them any other way.”

“It’s good enough for soldiers,” he answered.

“That is not a thing to say,” she told him in grave reproof. “Now what was it you wanted?”

“Nothing,” he said quickly, and wondered why

he would not beg. "That is, I wanted to ask the way."

She smiled with instant comprehension. "We have very little here, but would you like some cigarettes?"

"I can't pay for them," he said, and reddened.

"I am giving them to you," she answered calmly and stepped behind the counter. Then she returned and gave him two packages of a brand that one could smoke. "These are my own," she said.

Automatically he opened a pack and offered her one. "It wouldn't do here," she said. Then she looked at him frankly. "When you came in I thought you were somebody I had known." She studied his dark, lean face, and the black eyes, raising her eyes to his crisp, short hair that grew in a peak over his forehead. "No, it is gone now. I was mistaken."

"My name is Jerry Tower," he told her.

She shook her head. "No, I was mistaken."

They moved together to the door of the wooden house. The sun had gone behind the trees and twilight was drifting up from the earth, darkening the fresh green of the young leaves. Overhead the sky was still clear blue, save where spokes of gold shot up from the horizon. They stood silent, watching it.

"Maybe you saw me at St. Nazaire," Tower said, his assured voice wistful.

"I did not land at St. Nazaire," the girl answered.

He had talked with girls in uniform before—perfunctory phrases, idle conversation, cheap witticisms—he wanted to talk now, to say something that might prolong this moment, but no words would come.

"You are in the ambulance service," she said.

He nodded. "Attached to a French division. We are going to the front."

"For the first time?" Her voice had become a little breathless.

"For the first time," he repeated, very matter of fact to hide the unwilling excitement that was growing in him at the adventure ahead.

"Where?"

"Wherever the division takes over the line. It is coming up now. We are going to a place called Eplessier. The others have gone through, but I have been on detached duty."

"Eplessier is ten kilometers from here," she told him. "I have not been there."

"Why not?" His voice was imperative as if he were going to ask something important of her. Her laughter was a wraith of sound drifting off among the trees, checking him so that he could not say what he had wished to say.

"I must stay here in my enchanted forest and serve the lost soldiers who come through. Here are

some now." A belated truck filled with French infantry was stopping at the door of the *coöperative*. The girl turned away.

Tower wanted to ask her for a remembrance—her handkerchief or the worsted dolls, Rin Tin Tin and Ninette, protectors against bombs, which swung on their cord from her shoulder, but that was mere sentiment. He rejected it and then his astounded ears heard himself saying, his voice suddenly harsh:

"I am going to the front for the first time. Will you kiss me good-by?"

"I do not kiss soldiers," she told him, her voice remote again.

"You do not kiss privates," he said bitterly, and was sickened at the import of his words. "But if I had bars now—"

"You *do* say the wrong things," she whispered. "I was terribly mistaken. Kiss me, then, and go."

Quickly she stepped closer and raised her face. Jerry put his arm about her and bent down. His lips brushed her mouth, then he released her. She was gone instantly, but he did not see her go. Bewildered, he turned to his car, stepped in and drove off. He had forgotten what he had asked her, had forgotten almost what he had done. There remained only in his confused senses the faint perfume of her skin, that somewhere at some time he had known. On his cheek were tears that she had shed.

He came at last to Eplessier, a pale town in the twilight. Civilians, women, walked its streets and the houses were untouched. Here was life with comforts. A lamp glowed for an instant through an opened door and there was a smell of cooking on the air. But the darkness hid certain details; those walking in the streets wore gas masks slung about their necks, the windows were all blanketed and beneath the church tower which stood aloof beside a square were many new graves.

Beside the church Jerry found a man who waited for him, another soldier, profane and aggrieved at the long wait.

"Where in hell have you been?" he demanded. "All the others have come through. I'm frozen from the neck down." With nightfall it had turned colder and the inevitable dampness was rising.

No adequate retort occurred to Jerry; his thoughts were still bemused by the girl in the woods. "I got held up," he said. "The *médecin chef*—" His excuses died away. "Where do we go from here?"

Hitchcock climbed to the seat beside him. "We're quartered on a farm outside of town. Wouldn't you know it? We no sooner get to a decent place than they jerk us out of it," he asserted. "Well, I'm through anyway."

He was a short, stocky youth with red-brown hair and red-brown eyes, whose chin was aggres-

sive, matching his confident manner. Royal Hitchcock usually had got what he wanted because he fought for it.

"What do you mean you're through?" Tower asked, hearing the last words.

"Well, I'll tell you, Jerry," Hitchcock said confidentially. "I haven't spilled it to the outfit yet so keep it under your hat. You know there's an officers' training school at Meaux, and I've put in my application for it. The loot says it's sure to go through. He told me I was officer stuff."

"Was he drunk when he said it?" demanded Jerry incredulously.

Hitchcock took refuge in resentful silence.

"Well, he wasn't then," the driver continued. "But I don't see what you get out of it, Hitchy. They'll make a lousy second lieutenant out of you and give you a gold bar, but they'll ride you just the same."

"You don't understand," Hitchcock said loftily. "It's a step up. There's a chance for a man to advance in the army."

"What do you want to advance for? The war's going to end some day and then you'll be just where you were."

"Never believe it," Hitchcock said earnestly. "People are a hell of a lot more likely to buy real estate from an ex-captain than from a private. You think I want to be an officer so I can lord it over a

lot of birds? That isn't so. I want to secure my future and I want some action. A medal would look pretty swell pinned here." He tapped his chest.

"Aren't we going into action?" Jerry asked. "If there're any medals being passed out you'll probably get one, you usually do come out top dog."

"All that talk of action is the bunk," Hitchcock said positively. "I've got it all doped out. We won't see any action for a couple of months yet and by then the war will be over. What have we done this last month but trail around behind the lines with this division of ours that's afraid to fight? Just this morning one of the Twenty-seventh told me it was only a commercial war anyway. What do you know about that?"

Jerry grinned. "Attaboy! The loot was right. You've certainly got officer stuff in you—training camp officer."

"Oh, shut up," Hitchcock retorted. "Take this turn to your right." He was sulkily sure that profits and patriotism went hand in hand.

They swung into a tree-lined highway and Jerry gasped. A broad valley had opened before them flanked by shadowy hills. Beyond these hills, very far beyond, the pale tips of rockets glowed like phosphorescent balls against the sky. There was the distant sound of guns—a faint vibration settling on the still air. The Americans watched, wide-

eyed. The long, straight road, the river beyond it slipping in a leaden stream through bush-grown banks, were so peaceful, and yet ten kilometers or fifteen beyond men struggled in combat and sent up flares in their distress. An inexpressible emotion stirred in Jerry's soul, a strange awe at the beauty and poignancy of the night.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that 'no action' stuff," he whispered.

They drove on past the fields of young wheat.

At the farm which they came to other men from the ambulance section were watching the strange lights. Clustered about a barn they stared intently across the valley. Whatever their feelings they were masked behind an impassive demeanor.

"So this is Paris!" some one exclaimed in feeble humor.

Hitchcock and Jerry joined the group. The barn door opened and an old woman came out. She was tall and thin and hardly stooped. Her face was white, and black, lusterless eyes were sunken in it. A dress of some dark cloth clung to her angular body. She passed slowly from the barn toward the house without so much as glancing at the rockets hanging on the horizon, but she favored the Americans with a long, intense look. They felt uneasy under it.

By a field where something was growing she bent and picked up a clod of earth. This she

crumbled slowly in her hand, tossing it back on the bed with a gesture as of one sowing seed.

"Who is she?" Jerry asked.

Two or three spoke at once. "She owns this place." "She's cracked, the sergeant said so." "You oughta see her daughter. A pippin." "Yep, a damn fine girl named Renée. She's your fruit, Jerry. Lucky dog! I wish to God I knew French."

"All I care about women you could put in your eye," Jerry answered. It seemed somehow offensive that this farmer's mare should be mentioned when his thoughts were on another girl.

"I like the name o' Renée," a boy said sentimentally. "My kid's named Kate."

From a corner of the courtyard, where a field kitchen cast a red glow on the stones, the cook sent forth a brazen-lunged call to mess. The group dissolved in a race for the mess-line, the rockets and the guns forgotten.

"What do we eat? Oh, my God, fish again!"

"Never mind," said the man next to Jerry. "It's a good place to be. Clean hay to sleep on and all we've got to do is keep out of the house."

There was each day a certain routine for all. They rose at dawn, they ate, they washed their cars and themselves. They examined engines and tinkered with spark plugs; they washed cars again. This was Lieutenant Butt's favorite device for keeping

his men busy; it entailed no work for himself. In the month during which the section had been circling behind its division, drill had gradually been allowed to lapse. All formations were less considered. The lieutenant was learning that at the front no superior eye spied upon him. This was a relief. He relaxed his military manner and grew more human if more remote. Eplessier and the Lion d'Or drew him. His sergeant was capable of managing the section and he had no intention of infringing on a sergeant's duties. Once in a moment of open speech, induced by cognac, he had said that some officers came to France to complete their education and others to see the world. He, it seemed, had been graduated from college a dozen years before. Just now he was seeing the world through the eyes of one girl. Her name was Monique. Lieutenant Butt wished that his education had included more French.

The men were not concerned with the philanderings of authority. There was a girl nearer than the town to hold them. They watched with interest the comings and goings of Renée between barns and house, her sabots clattering on the courtyard, her slim shoulders bent under weighted pails. They speculated on her age, her past, her morals.

"Frogs work their women like horses," Casey, the red-headed, exclaimed indignantly, and volunteered to help her with the load of sticks she was

carrying from the woodshed. Renée accepted his offer and showed him where it should be piled in an empty room off the kitchen. But there was more than one load needed, it seemed. An hour later, Casey, crimson and sweating, found that he had emptied the entire shed. Then Renée thanked him in soft, liquid words that he could not understand and shut the door in his face. At noon the sergeant with a neatly written complaint in his hand signed by Madame Moreau, announced that the cooks had been stealing wood, and that it would have to stop. But Renée had seen to that. Men who had watched Casey hauling it for her jeered at the way he had been sold. They got no further with her.

Only Jerry Tower remained indifferent to the presence of the girl. When she came near him he hardly raised his eyes; when she passed he did not look after her. A fury of impatience, hardly restrained, tore at him. Strict orders held the men to the farm. Even Eplessier, within walking distance, was not allowed, and to go beyond was out of the question. He thought somberly of deserting for a day—St. Jean au Bois where the Y.M.C.A. stood could be reached in no time—but detection was too certain to make it feasible. The men were to begin their work at the front any moment, the lieutenant had said, and nobody was willing to jeopardize his chances of that. On the skyline rockets still flamed and faded, the guns boomed

softly and continuously, but the men no longer paused for them. They wanted action; they were there for it. Rumors spread of great battles to the south.

Within the house Renée and her grandmother moved from room to room always busy, but it was like rest to them. The spring planting had been done, acres and acres, but far fewer than before, Madame Collette complained, and they had done it. At night they lay on their beds, slack and exhausted, their brains too numb for thought. For them, too, the lights and the guns had become an old story, but then they had lived with them for these three years.

"Tell me, grandmother," Renée said, "did the Boche when you were here wash so often at the trough? Were they well-ordered like the Americans?"

The old woman's eyes became blacker, fathomless, her chin drooped and she stared steadily at her knee where her fingers tapped, one two, one two.

"Can't you remember?" the girl cried. "Won't you ever speak?"

Madame Collette looked placidly at her granddaughter. "The dark one could be trusted," she announced. "The one with the white teeth."

Renée sighed. Ever since that day when Madame Collette had slipped back in the face of the advancing Germans to Hautefontaine her mind had been

at times a little touched, her words somewhat wild. Of her experiences on the farm until Renée had returned she said nothing; not even the priest could make her talk.

"But could he be trusted?" Madame Collette asked anxiously, as if they were arguing.

"You mean the American," Renée said. "He is handsome, is he not?" She rose and went to the window where she looked down. Jerry, going across the courtyard, felt her eyes upon him. He knew she was standing in an upper window, gazing impassively down; it had happened before.

"She stares at me too much," he thought resentfully. "Damn it, she's always staring." He passed on.

Renée turned into the room again. "Do you want to trust him?" she asked clearly to break the daze in her grandmother's eyes. What she said meant nothing to her and yet she asked it. Madame Collette as usual did not reply.

"Damn it," Jerry was thinking, "any other time I'd be wild to have her give me a tumble. She's pretty, too."

Thus three days passed.

But it could not last for always. On the morning of the fourth day there was an unwonted stir about the camp; orders, confused and contradictory, were issued. It was emphasized more clearly that no one was to leave the farm; the One hundred and sixty-

second Division French with its attendant train of American ambulances were to take over the lines at nightfall.

To the lieutenant went Thomas Bender with a request. He was the youngest member of the section, a boy of seventeen with eager eyes and a delicate, almost effeminate face, who had joined the army by lying about his age with the tacit consent of an indulgent mother who could deny him nothing. The men called him "Babe."

"Am I going to get to drive when we go in tonight, sir?" he demanded.

The officer's sallow face wearily gathered together into an expression of sternness.

"You are not," he said with decision. "The outfit needs a company clerk and I have to have an orderly."

For his own part he had doubts as to Bender's stamina under fire; the boy was exceedingly nervous and there had been that time in St. Nazaire when the officer had found him weeping, possibly because the slum was cold or something.

Now the youngster looked at him for some sign of relenting; finding none his own face contorted in futile rage. "It's just because you think I haven't got the guts," he asserted.

"We'll use you when the right time comes," Lieutenant Butt said pacifically. It was, he found, easier to keep his men in order by humoring them.

Further, without the example of other officers about him, he was unable to retain that conception of immeasurable superiority which he knew guiltily was due his rank.

Babe Bender turned away. "Hell," he muttered petulantly.

This, the lieutenant knew was insubordination. There must be some law to cover so gross a breach of respect, but unfortunately he could not think of it. He had never been able to take his position seriously and the men were always finding him out.

"Say 'sir' when you speak to me," he ordered sharply, and wondered if this were adequate.

"Hell, sir," said the private defiantly, and retreated. It made a story to tell the mess-line anyway.

But he might have saved his temper and his plea, for that evening when the men were gathered about the kitchen Lieutenant Butt appeared, his features slack with disappointment, and announced flatly that orders to go forward had been withdrawn. They would for the present remain where they were, but it was possible that their division might be on the move again shortly.

The men howled with indignation and the lieutenant, after a conference with the sergeant, gave leave for all save an unlucky few necessary to guard the camp.

"You'll be back at midnight," he said without

any conviction that they would. The soldiers were not in the least grateful for this concession.

There was bitterness in all except Royal Hitchcock, who was some time to make a career in real estate. He had been increasingly anxious during the day at the news that the outfit was to see action at last. He had in his pocket the paper he had angled for, but he wondered if after all he might not have made a mistake. His ambitions included a decoration and that seemed more immediate than his reasoning had led him to suppose. Now he was triumphant.

"Listen, you guys," he announced. "Who was right on this rumor stuff? Haven't I said all along we weren't going to see any action? The French have more ambulances than they can use now. Well, I called the turn and now I'm going to blow. I've got my papers here for that officers' training school at Meaux. The next time you see me I'll be a loot, but you needn't salute me unless a colonel's around. I'll remember my friends." He was cheerful, assertive, and already a note of patronage had crept into his voice.

The men reacted unpleasantly. Their disappointment was tending to draw them closer together, and this departure seemed like desertion. A loosely bound organization until now, their *esprit de corps* was beginning to tighten.

"Well, be on your way," said one.

"I'd as soon salute you as some of the scum we have to snap into it for," said another.

A few shook his hand limply. Royal Hitchcock came to Jerry, hurt and surprised. "What have I done to the gang?" he demanded. "They treat me like I was a leper."

"You put on too much side, Hitchy," Jerry said after a pause. "I'm telling you for your own good. They don't like much your going away to training school and they don't like at all the way you carry it off."

"They're a bunch of bums," Hitchcock said bitterly. "Back in the States I thought they were regular, but they're not. If I saw a man making a chance to advance himself I'd be the first to congratulate him."

"Maybe they don't think you're advancing yourself, or maybe they're sore not to be in your shoes," Jerry hazarded shrewdly. "Anyway I congratulate you, Hitchy." He held out his hand. Hitchcock shook it gratefully; his spirit had been more bruised than Jerry realized. This epic thing he had worked for had been greeted with jeers.

They had been walking together to Eplessier, Hitchcock with his belongings in a *musette* swung over one shoulder, and now they stood by the square across from the church.

"Come on down to the *gare* and wait till my train comes," Hitchcock suggested.

Jerry considered it. He knew that Hitchcock wanted him to do this, he understood dimly why his friend would be happier if he were not left alone those last minutes before going out to meet the unknown, but such a course would have interfered with his own plans.

"I guess I won't," he said. "See you in Paris, kid."

"Come on, I'll buy you a drink," Hitchcock said desperately. He jingled change in his pocket invitingly. But Jerry had been paid also.

"Nope," he said definitely. "Not to-night. So long, old timer."

As he turned away he saw Hitchcock's face, crestfallen and ashamed.

"I can't help it," Jerry said to himself. "He thinks I'm sore like the others, but I'm not." He walked briskly off in the direction of his enchanted forest.

But at intervals Hitchcock's face obtruded itself before his eyes. Finally he dismissed it definitely. "I couldn't," he thought, "go on wasting sympathy on everybody that wants it, or there wouldn't be any left for me."

From time to time he looked anxiously back along the road for a truck. Without a lift he could hardly get to the Y.M.C.A. before it closed. At last a French camion lurched out of the darkness and Jerry hailed it. The bearded driver clanked to a halt. Jerry climbed gratefully inside.

"There are others," the driver observed, starting again, and then it was too late to retreat.

"What are you doing here?" Jerry demanded indignantly of the two men he found sprawled under the canvas top. Judkins and Holmburg lit cigarettes, their eyes wide and innocent.

"Why, we was just taking a ride," they said together. "Want to come along?"

"Like hell you were," Jerry retorted. "You were trailing me. I saw you sneaking down the hill and I saw you skulking around the church. What's the big idea?"

"We was afraid you might get into trouble, darling," Judkins said delicately. He was one of the section cooks, a fat, bland youth who smelled always of grease. "You're too good-lookin' to be out alone at night."

"An' so we came along to keep you company," Oscar Holmburg finished. He was a section mechanic who had elected himself to that position because he imagined it might keep him away from the front. His dislike for physical violence was profound when it concerned himself. He would have preferred to be company clerk, but no one could imagine so huge and hairy a man in that position and so the mechanic's job had to content him. His lack of knowledge had ruined many a good engine in the beginning, but he was learning and his strength was of use. No car needed to be jacked

when he was around. He roared when he spoke, his eyebrows were bushy and his eyes snapped sparks. To those who did not know him he was most impressive.

Jerry looked at his tormentors with disfavor. "You bastards," he said pleasantly at last, throwing himself on their mercy. "If I told you I was off to see a girl would you get out and walk back?"

They shouted with pleasure at their astuteness, moving closer to their victim so he might not escape. "I knew it," Judkins proclaimed. "When you who can't keep your eye off a skirt wouldn't look at that Renée girl back on the farm, I says to Oscar here, 'He's got a better one cached somewhere, an' on his first night out, we'll look her over, too.'"

"All right," said Jerry. "Look her over then, but if you try to speak to her I'll break your necks."

They arrived in time at the glade in the forest, St. Jean au Bois. The stone house, which in better days had been a lodge, stood deserted, dilapidated and forlorn, but before the other, the wooden building, there was an enormous activity. Men in blue uniforms were entering, they hung from windows; indeed, the woods itself was full of them. Within, under the glare of yellow light, they crowded together on benches, there was a voluble chatter in rough voices, highly inflected, and the air was blue with the smoke of coarse tobacco. Jerry's heart

dropped. With such a mob to serve, it would be impossible to speak to the girl at all alone; there might only be a chance for a passing word, if she were willing. If she were! There was a pardon for an offense which he had to ask.

Then he saw that the character of the building had changed. The counter had disappeared with its few supplies; the neat piles of writing paper, marked with a triangle, had gone. It was no longer an American Y.M.C.A., breathing an air of order and faint sanctity; it was a French *coöperative*, without supplies. The men were drinking red wine from their canteens. There was the constant clatter of passing tin cups.

Jerry's eyes swept to the back of the house, but the girl was not there. In her place was an elderly Frenchman in a brown uniform, nondescript, who blinked benignly at the men. Such a wave of disappointment swept over the American that, for an instant, he felt ill. Bitterness rose in him; if he had only asked her name, or better still, how long she was going to stay. But having found her here, it seemed as if she must always stay. It was his first experience with the impermanence of war.

His friends were clamoring for explanations. "Where is this *jane*?" "Say, Jerry, come across."

"She was only a dream," he said moodily. He found a seat and became lost in his own thoughts.

Judkins was poking him in the ribs. "Snap out

of it, kid," he urged. "The old Frog here wants to speak to you. Ain't this our gang?"

Jerry became conscious that a sergeant, over whose snaggled teeth drooped a mustache, was smiling while he held out a cup of wine. "Have a drink, comrade," he said urgently. "This is not the night to be sad. To-morrow, yes."

"By God, they are!" Jerry cried. "The Twenty-seventh. Where have you been?" he demanded. "We thought you'd quit us and gone to Paris."

The sergeant was grinning more than ever. "No chance of that with Maurier," he asserted. "It is always fight, fight and more fight."

"Well, I'd like to see some of it," Jerry answered.

"But it is true," the sergeant cried. "We have been rushed up in camions to get here. To-morrow we enter the lines."

"Listen to what he says," Jerry told the others. "To-morrow we're going in. I don't believe it. The Frogs have more latrine rumors than we have."

Holmburg had turned noticeably pale. "I'm here to tell you that if any man breaks a car at the front, it stays there," he roared. "I'll do repairing back at headquarters, but I'm damned if I nurse a Ford under shell-fire!" He pounded the table with his huge fist until the Frenchmen turned to stare at him with admiration.

"Maybe some o' you birds will get used to cold

rations," Judkins said cynically. "I'm sick o' fryin' bacon."

"You'll be frying bacon as usual," Jerry told him. "I don't believe this tale."

"Look at the room then," said the sergeant, as if he had understood.

Jerry looked. Beneath the hilarity, was a feeling of strain. The men laughed and shouted. Too noisy. Some of them were writing letters under cover of a spread arm, with stubs of pencils that they chewed at in their search for words. A man began to sing "Sambre et Meuse," and some others caught it up, wavering; but the sergeant checked them.

"Not that now. Later, for those who are left." He broke into "Madelon" and the room roared after him in an account of the frail lady, her petticoats and her loves. The Americans sang, too.

"It *is* true!" Jerry cried. "By God, I'll drink!" He caught up the cup. "*Vive le pinard!* And here's money for more." He tossed a pack of francs, flimsy, blue paper, on the table. Red wine appeared again and again. Others joined them, drawn to the untried Americans.

"A good boy, that," said the Twenty-seventh approvingly. "He drinks like a Frenchman."

A pale young man was declaiming—"Le Moulin de mon Pays." It ran on to its end. There were cries of "Speech! Speech!" and friendly arms lifted Jerry

to a table. He swayed slightly, looking down on them, his dark face smiling, his black eyes aglow.

"We are not fighting men," he began, "but if it is necessary we will fight, for we are here to help France." He paused uncertainly. His French was good enough, but the idiom seemed confusing. Encouraging cheers greeted him. "We love France," he continued, "her songs, her women and her wine. Give me a drink of wine." He stooped. "And when this is over, we will all meet here again." His speech ended abruptly as he toppled back on the neck of the indignant Holmburg.

"Not all of us will meet here," muttered the old sergeant.

They were drinking once more. The volume of sound rose higher, crashing against the pale stars, the black arc of the sky.

Later, Judkins had the forethought to look at his watch. "It's two o'clock," he observed, "an' the loot said to be back by twelve."

"T' hell with him," Jerry muttered indistinctly.

Nevertheless, he found himself walking along a road, cool breezes brushing his damp face. "You won't bust your car at the front, will you, Jerry?" Holmburg was asking tearfully, his voice a bass roar. "I had a good job once in a butcher shop, but I couldn't stand the blood."

To Jerry, it all seemed inexpressibly amusing. Bitterness for the lost girl and exaltation had

merged in him until he felt like a god. He tried to put it into words and failed.

"I won't do anything to hurt your chances of getting back, Oscar," he said solemnly. "Got to get back myself. This is—this is—an interlude." He waved one arm grandly.

"Keep your paws to yourself," Judkins said, stepping out of reach.

Jerry ignored him. "You've got to get back to your butcher shop, Oscar, I've got to get back to the bank. Can't duck it any longer. The old man won't stand for it. I want to, too," he asserted. "Clean clothes, decent food, a bed. That's my life." Suddenly he felt as if he were going to weep, but restrained himself.

"Let's have a drink," said Judkins sympathetically. "I've got it here."

A frantic lieutenant and an harassed sergeant met them at Hautefontaine.

"It's the last time I do anything for you men," the officer declared. "By God, you don't appreciate the things that are done for you. We're going to take over our posts to-day, now, and you're one of the first to drive, Tower." He turned to the sergeant. "Is he too drunk to drive, Dale?"

"I am not drunk, sir," Jerry said precisely.

"It doesn't make any difference," Lieutenant Butt answered. "Drunk or sober, you go out."

Later Jerry saw Renée near the barns. He

thought that she meant to speak to him, but he turned away to plunge his face in cold water. His head ached and his glorious, exalted night had turned sodden. She was pretty, but he did not wish to speak; the French language was a blur on his tongue.

He was driving at last, carefully and exactly, along a straight road that led up from the River Aisne. Three stretchers bumped in the car, and a road map was on the seat beside him. As if a curtain had been raised, the scene changed. It had been neat and well arranged, but now it was no longer neat. A shattered house stood in a field, its buckled roof and torn walls looking insubstantial and unreal; but no grain grew in that field. It was barren, sere, and filled with holes. Here was a fragment of barbed wire, rusted with disuse. The condition of the road grew worse. From the plain above, the guns sounded. Suddenly they were very loud.

"Bear right at the next road until you come to the dressing station," Jerry instructed himself. He never got there. There was a turn, and beyond that stood a little group, looking down. At the sight of an ambulance they became animated, vigorous figures, urging him to stop.

Pulled to the roadside was the wreckage of what had been a cart, but its purpose was no longer apparent in the destruction. The animal that drew it

was dead. Its driver lay in the ditch, but like the cart, it was no longer possible to tell anything about him save that he was a man. Where his face had been was now a crawling, creeping mask of red. His helmet had fallen off, and his hair, too, was reddened. In the pulp of scarlet, the remains of lips moved continually but without words. There was an acrid odor in the air that caught at one's throat. Down the road came certain other men, bent under packs. They glanced once at the object in the ditch, then plodded on, their eyes averted, and with quickened steps.

The men with the wounded man were pulling down the tailboard of the car; they were opening one of the stretchers that had been within. Jerry stared, his eyes widened; he tried to look away, but could not.

"I've read about it and read about it," he thought, "and yet I didn't understand!"

The men by the stretcher were calling to him. He ran to help.

Later on his return Sergeant Dale took him to one side. "I want to talk to you, Tower," he said.

Jerry looked at the older man's face; it was grave but serene so evidently there were no storm clouds brewing. "Shoot, Sarge," he said easily. "What is it?"

"You ought to know," Dale told him, "but I

don't believe you do." He became silent for a moment, his eyes intent. "When are you going to snap out of it?" he asked abruptly.

"Out of what?"

"Out of whatever's the matter with you, and into your job," Dale retorted.

"I am on the job!" Jerry cried. He was not unreasonably hurt. "I do my work as well as the next man, and what was the matter with this morning? Oh, I know, it's because I came in stewed last night."

"It is not," Dale contradicted him calmly. "And of course you do your work as well as the next man, but I expect you to do it better."

"Well, I'd like to oblige you, Sergeant, but I can't," Jerry answered. "After all, driving a car is driving a car; no one ever told me I wasn't a good chauffeur, and standing guard is standing guard. I don't quite get you. Are you sure it isn't because I stayed out after hours?"

In his earnestness Dale took him by the arm. "You're as well disciplined as any one on the surface," he admitted. "And if you weren't I have enough authority and experience to handle that, when I need to. No, it's something inside you that doesn't quite click. Man, I wouldn't talk this way to Cassidy; he does the best he can within the limits of his brain, but you're different, you've got intelligence. Take your French alone; my God,

what I wouldn't give to talk this lingo! And your influence in the outfit is enormous; the men follow your lead anywhere."

Jerry was vaguely pleased; he was conscious enough of his influence although the leadership of men meant nothing to him.

"I don't try to influence them," he explained to his sergeant. "Let them stand on their own feet. It's what I do."

"But you should influence them," Dale protested. "It might lead somewhere."

Jerry laughed. "Hitchcock was saying something like that the other night, in regard to himself. I suppose you think I ought to be after an officer's job, but I assure you I don't want it. I'm not interested in being an officer and after the war is over I wouldn't be. I haven't noticed Butt for nothing and I know what it means." He laughed again. "I'm ashamed of you, Sergeant, an old timer, going back on his own code. Haven't I heard you say a soldier's first and only slogan is, 'Pass the buck'?"

"Don't adopt it while I'm around," Dale advised him dryly. "And I didn't mean it might lead to being a second lieutenant. Probably you'll finish up the war as you entered it, a private. But it might—it might possibly lead to your making a few discoveries about yourself. Never mind," he continued kindly as Jerry looked puzzled. "Some day, perhaps, you'll grow up."

Jerry found himself dismissed and there was no further conversation on that subject. Sergeant Dale gave orders, but he rarely talked.

To Renée, the fact that the Americans were quartered on her farm made no difference at all, and yet in a sense, it made an enormous difference. The reserve which had held her, and the isolation which had surrounded her was breaking down. She had, until now, been suspicious of all strangers, including the French. With a peasant's tenacity she preferred people from her own section of the country, and by choice, from her own commune. She was learning, however, that foreigners were not wholly undesirable. These boys did not steal more than she expected them to—her chickens, their eggs, the stored wood were moderately safe. They cleaned up the dirt that they created to an extent which she thought ridiculous. They tried to make love to her, but they could be repulsed. She had nothing but contempt for those girls in Eplessier, like Monique Pinceloup, who had given themselves to soldiers.

They made love to her, all, that is, but one. Continually she watched Jerry when he was off duty. That was less often now. The men were busy, their olive-drab cars toiling up over the hill in a complicated routine which she made no effort to understand. Only the results were obvious to her.

Ambulances stopped at all hours of the day and night in the courtyard. There, their weary, blood-stained burdens were rechecked, and sent on to the hospitals behind the lines. New cars were started for the front so that posts were never abandoned. At times, a wounded man had died before he reached the farm. These the bored and reluctant French personnel removed from the cars and buried in a corner of the cabbage field.

Madame Collette was incensed. She protested to the American lieutenant and the French lieutenant; she threatened to write to the general of the division at the desecration of her field. There were, she pointed out, other spots not under cultivation. But these were farther away in stony ground. Nothing was done about the matter, and the row of crude crosses among the cabbage plants grew.

It was all part of the bitterness of war, Madame Collette thought. Her granddaughter engaged her for a moment, and she forgot her other troubles.

"You are wearing the chain with the blue locket," the old woman exclaimed. Renée blushed. "And yesterday, you wore the flowered silk waist to work in. You have not worn that for three years."

The girl said nothing.

"Are you no longer wearing mourning for Jacques L'Empreur?" her grandmother asked.

"We do not know positively that he is dead," Renée answered, her voice low.

"*Tiens!*" cried Madame Collette. "Nothing is more sure. His own mother admits it. The shell came down blotting out all near it like this." She struck her knee suddenly with her open hand. "There was a retreat, *par example*. Why not? There is always a retreat in this sacred war. Later in the advance, Jacques' bracelet, bearing his name and number, was found, but marked, mind you, by the explosion. Naturally of his body there was nothing. Could anything be more clear? You, his fiancée, were in mourning. Now you wear blue lockets and flowered silk."

"I have changed my mind," Renée insisted. "It may be a sin to believe he is dead, and I do not wish to wear black forever."

"It is because of the American," the grandmother contradicted her calmly. "He will not consider your blue locket."

The girl flushed more painfully. "You are remembering well to-night," she whispered. "Too well."

Madame Collette's eyes became dazed, then blank.

"Could he be trusted?" she asked anxiously.

Renée stood up, putting aside the potatoes she had been paring. "You must ask him that yourself," she said, and went out into the courtyard.

An ambulance had just drawn up in the enclosure. The group about it had dispersed, finding it

empty. The driver was getting stiffly down from the seat. He pushed back his helmet and the sinking sun touched his face. It looked tired and pale. A film of dust had settled on it.

Rigidly Renée walked across to the car, conscious that every eye in the courtyard was watching her. She touched her locket with nervous fingers as if it were a charm.

"Good evening, Monsieur," she said.

"Good evening, Mademoiselle," Jerry answered. He was surprised that she should speak to him. Because they had not spoken at once like the others, a sort of secret hostility had grown up between them, a pride in their silence which neither would break. He waited for her to continue.

"It was perhaps difficult in the lines to-day?" she asked, as if seeking a subject.

"One is always fatigued," he answered noncommittally. In the distance, he could see the grinning face of Holmburg, the fat, curious face of Judkins, a number of others. Already he could hear their comments.

The soft booming of guns drifted across the Aisne. "The sunset guns," Renée exclaimed. "It is always worse at night, Monsieur."

"I do not drive to-night, I sleep, thanks be to God," Jerry reassured her.

"But you will another night," Renée said hurriedly. "And so I have brought you something to

wear—a protection against shells. I made them." She thrust something into his hand, and turned away while Jerry muttered his thanks.

Then he looked down at the worsted dolls worn by every one—Rin Tin Tin and Ninette. They dangled at the end of their cord, gay little figures in yellow and green. His mind flashed back to that day in the woods, and the figures which the unknown girl had worn. Her face rose before him—copper hair, eyes rain-washed. The sinking sun had dazzled him. There had been about her something ineffably familiar, something like a strain of music which he could almost recall. Abruptly, he thrust Renée's dolls into his pocket and strode away.

But it seemed ungracious to leave the matter like that, and later, after mess, he deliberately sought her out, asking her to walk with him. Her eyes upturned to his in a moment of questioning, then at once she agreed. They left Hautefontaine, taking the lane which led to the highway. Turning aside, they came to a place where a brook tumbled through lush grass to the river beyond. There was a rock and they sat down. Lovers, in immemorial custom, had scarred it with their names, but these were lost in the gray moss. The long twilight persisted and for once the guns were at peace.

Actually, little was said. Jerry thanked her for the dolls and she pinned them to the lapel of his coat. He paid her compliments in stilted French.

"Mademoiselle should be married. She is the prettiest girl in Eplessier."

"I had a fiancé, but he was killed," Renée said calmly. "Jacques L'Empreur. His mother is the proprietress of the Soleil. He was her only child."

"But that is sad," Jerry exclaimed.

"It is war," Renée answered, "and it happened a long time ago. Almost at the beginning." She was not anxious to have him think she still mourned.

"I am glad you are not unhappy," Jerry murmured. Probably it had been one of these arranged marriages, he thought. The idea interested him, but he could not believe it satisfactory, nor was it a thing to which he would submit. The French on the whole were an odd race.

Renée continued. "There are worse things than death. For example, my grandmother; her mind is affected by the war, and that is very sad."

"So?" asked Jerry. "What happened to her?"

"It was in 1914, at the beginning, and although we thought that everywhere our men were winning battles, yet the Germans came and so we had to leave Hautefontaine. Everybody left." Her voice became somber. "The roads were filled with people and the dust raised by the cattle choked us. I remember so well," she said, as if it were something that had happened when she was a child. "We did not know where to go. One said Nanteuil, and another Crépy; they talked

of Paris. And while they talked, my grandmother slipped away, trying to get back to the farm. She wanted to protect it. All day long I searched, and at nightfall, when I heard where she had gone, it was too late. They were burning Senlis then. I found her after we came back, but she was not the same. She would stare for hours at the hill-top which we called *Maison Rouge*." Her finger pointed to the low hill to the east where, half hidden in foliage, the great pinkish stone could be seen dimly outlined in the half light.

"Why did she look at *Maison Rouge*?" Jerry asked. He knew the place well; it was on the road to the trenches, but to the left, and abandoned because of its position.

Renée shrugged. "I think the Boche came over that way, but who knows? Her mind is unwell. We must not always talk of war," she continued, seeking to entertain him. "Tell me of America, of your home."

And so he tried to create for her a picture of Waynesboro, stumbling over the phrases while she helped him. It was dull enough and commonplace, but the girl was fascinated.

"Houses of wood!" she exclaimed. "But I should like to see that. Always I have wanted to travel, Monsieur. Until the war, I saw so little."

"You may marry an American and then you will see it all," he smiled. The girl blushed, and as the

import of his words became clear to him, a constraint fell upon Jerry and the thread of intimacy between them was broken.

They walked slowly back to the farm. At the door, Renée bade him good night. "It's funny how the French like to shake hands," he thought, retaining for an instant the pleasant sensation of her cool fingers.

In the barn where the men sprawled on stretchers, he was greeted with the inevitable comments, broad innuendo.

"Oh, boy!" was all Jerry said, and permitted them to form their own conclusions. He conformed rigidly to the ethics and manners of his class; he would have resented the statement that he was romantic or cast in a finer mold, yet so far as Renée was concerned, admiration, half unwilling, was growing within him.

"Now there's a girl who's been through a lot," he thought. "We crab about going out on post and we crab about the grub, but compared to her, we haven't suffered anything."

Madame Collette was still dressed when Renée entered the house. "You have become like Monique Pinceloup! Have you no shame?" the old woman exclaimed.

"There is nothing between us but friendship," Renée retorted.

"There is no friendship between men and

women," Madame Collette answered from the depth of her experience.

The battle deepened and grew fiercer with a roar of guns. With mixed emotions, the Americans learned that their division had merely been "holding the line." In another quarter, great offensives had been started and repulsed, for the moment. Château Thierry and Belleau Wood were names becoming known to the world. Men still fought bitterly beyond Château Thierry, nearer to Jaulgonne, but the force of the German effort had moved. From Vic, across the Soissons road, down to the dim reaches of the forest of Villers Cotterets, a salient had been formed. By increasing pressure, the Germans sought to pinch it out.

There was alarm in Eplessier and talk of evacuating the town. The inhabitants lived in cellars and the town was no longer a desirable place to go to. Nightly air-raiders scattered bombs, seeking the railroad station, and trains had ceased to run. Farmers for the most part remained.

"The Government is glad to have the food we raise, and so it leaves us at the front," Renée explained to Jerry. She was impassive at this new menace, working in the fields until dark although her body ached, a gas mask slung about her neck.

The ambulance section was tired, too. Long nights were spent in dressing-stations reeking of

dampness and fresh blood. Roads and cross roads suffered under a hail of shells and every ruined house which might be used as a shelter was drenched with gas. Cars began to break down under the strain, or because of direct hits. Holmburg, the mechanic, was like one distraught. His face had become gaunt, his sunken eyes glowed while he wrestled with the fear that held him. For all his size, for all his strength, he seemed unable to face danger; but none recognized this.

Elliott, a driver, came in one day, his face gray with caked dust. Rivulets of sweat streaked it, although his teeth chattered as with cold. Holmburg shivered, too. Elliott was on foot.

"There's a job for you," the latter said directly to the mechanic. "A shell came, zowie, and hit the back of my car out on the road to Hors. You want to hop to it and bring it in."

Holmburg turned pale. "What's the big idea?" he shouted. "Why didn't you drive it in yourself?"

"Because it won't run," Elliott said sharply. "The whole rear axle is gone. You'll need the mechanic's car."

"Oh, if it's the rear axle, I guess we won't bother about that car," Holmburg said with an appearance of relief. "It's done for."

"Go on, you big bum," Elliott advised him. "What'll the loot say if you leave cars cluttering up the road? Besides, it can be repaired."

"You drivers have it pretty soft," Holmburg said miserably. "You bust your cars up and then you beat it. But I'm the baby has to go out under shell fire and fix them."

"There's not a shell near there. It's all over."

"Did you beat it?" some one asked Elliott curiously.

"Hell, no," he answered in surprise. "I had some wounded. After we got hit, I dragged 'em out and laid them in the ditch. They tossed a few more seventy-sevens around so I lay on top of 'em till it was over. I didn't like it," he admitted, "but there was nothing else to do. I'm not big enough to carry a man."

"You probably crawled underneath them," Holmburg said bitterly. It was exactly what he would have done, he thought.

"Just because you're about eight feet tall without a nerve in your body doesn't mean that nobody else has guts," Elliott snapped. "I stayed with those guys until Tower came along and took them in his car. As far as my car goes, you can fix it or leave it." He turned away.

"You oughtn't to ride him, Oscar," some one said reprovingly. "Even if we little fellows aren't men of iron like you, we try to do our bit."

Judkins, the cook, smiled secretly. He was the only one who suspected the truth about the huge

mechanic, and he kept it to himself. They were friends.

"I'll get going," Holmburg said, and for once his voice was almost low.

He found the car as Elliott had stated, just before one entered the village of Hors, a scattering of houses abandoned and shattered, in the cellars of which were located a dressing-station and a regimental headquarters. The ambulance had been flung by the force of the explosion halfway across the road, and Holmburg saw at once that it would have to be towed in. Its radiator pointed toward the lines, and there was only a narrow passage left on the road. By careful driving, the mechanic edged his own car between the wreck and the steep embankment until he was beyond the obstruction. He lived to regret it.

A rope for hauling had no sooner been brought out than over the brow of the hill appeared a line of caissons and a *fourgon* which had been bringing up supplies. Of necessity, they halted at the dual obstruction. The drivers exchanged profane words; they directed profane words at the American. Holmburg, who could not understand them, was unmoved.

"You'll stay there till I get this damn thing hitched up if it takes a week. What the hell's your hurry, anyway?" he asked them generally.

The Frenchmen vociferated more violently. They were impressed by the stranger's size and the power of his voice, but they did not like the situation. Then lassitude settled suddenly upon them. This was war and an American. The combination was unbeatable. They lighted cigarettes; the air was full of blue haze and small talk. One drank deeply of wine from a canteen which gurgled. On the horizon a *drachen*, one of the squat, German balloons, tugged at its moorings and surveyed the strange scene.

There was warning from the first shell. It began in a whistle that grew to a wail. It howled overhead and exploded in the field beyond in a geyser of brown earth and black smoke. Instantly, the false tranquillity that held the group vanished. Cigarettes were flung away, a clamor of shrieks burst forth—a long-drawn out crescendo of imprecations. Horses were plunging in their traces.

Holmburg dropped the rope and leaned over the back of his car. It was as if a huge hand had gripped his stomach and contracted. Sickness, the beginnings of nausea, swept over him. He retched and gripped the car while sweat started. He could not raise his eyes for fear the landscape would be spattered with blood. Then he became aware that the roar of the shell had died away and that a new volume of sound was directed at him. He raised his hand feebly at the storming of the men as if to

quiet them, than he sprang to the front of his car and seized the crank.

A second shell came crashing down into the road fifty feet ahead. In the stunning roar, a sharper noise was heard—the whine of flying metal. Men crouched on their seats, faces covered, a horse reared with a cry, its raked side bloody. The crank whirled and slipped from Holmburg's fingers. Then blind panic had him. He could not see to crank the car; he could not even run. Only one thought was in his mind—that the ambulance had blocked the way so that the next shell would get them all.

He lurched to the ambulance, caught it under the tailboard and stood upright. The car swayed, but did not rise. He gripped it again and strained until his eyes became flecked with red and the veins stood out in his purple face. The car tipped slowly up, and with a rush Holmburg pivoted it on its front wheels, then sent it crashing down the bank. The way was clear. The caissons were going through, their drivers lashing the horses' sides. The *fourgon* passed as another shell came roaring down.

A vast silence followed. Save for the clatter of the retreating carts, there was no sound. His great frame sagging, Holmburg got to the mechanic's car. The engine started at once with a reassuring hum. It occurred to the man that if it would only continue growing louder and louder, it might at

last blot the sound of shells forever from his ears. He climbed in and drove away.

"Oh, my God!" he whispered to himself. "They'll kill me for this. I'll get Leavenworth for life. They'll burn me at the stake!" His mouth was hot and bitter with the taste of blood where his clenched teeth had torn his lip.

Once again at Hautefontaine, he slipped into the darkest corner of the barn, where he sat, his head in his hands. If he was observed, no one spoke. That night there was excitement and rejoicing in the outfit. It became known that Oscar Holmburg had distinguished himself at the front. Under severe fire, and with the greatest devotion, he had saved some six teamsters and their horses, by his great strength and ready wit. Lieutenant Butt himself confirmed it. The mechanic's act had been reported; he was glad to announce unofficially that Holmburg would receive a *Croix de Guerre*. Their first decoration!

Men crowded about the giant, shaking his hand, clapping him on the back. "I wish we had more like you," Lieutenant Butt said with almost a show of emotion.

"We aim to get you drunker than you've ever been before, big boy," some one announced. "I haven't got much jack, but here goes five francs for the pot." He tossed his money on the ground. Bills and silver followed.

"Beat it into the town, Babe, and buy out all the booze there is," Cassidy said to young Bender.

"I don't want to," said the boy. "You're always making me run your errands."

Cassidy gave him a friendly shove. "Go on now like I tell you an' if you're a good kid, we'll give you a swig of booze." Bender trotted off and they turned again to Holmburg. But the big mechanic seemed dazed, strangely silent for him.

"How'd you feel, Oscar?" Judkins asked, and watched him curiously.

Suddenly the mechanic's spirits returned. "I felt damn bad," he admitted with a friendly roar. "But what was I to do? Let them poor birds get wiped out by a shell? No, sir, that ain't Oscar." He shouted with laughter and opened his huge hands to show them where the car had cut into the flesh, but he thought in anguish, "They'll find me out. Oh, my God, some day they'll find me out!"

Holmburg's elevation to fame found an echo in Thomas Bender. Slight of body and high-strung to the point of being neurotic, he had found in the mechanic an ideal for his hero-worship, but a certain diffidence prevented his expressing it directly to his idol. Instead, he turned to Jerry, who had been kind to him in an absent-minded way. He admired Jerry also, but he had no awe of him; their background was too much alike. Now he attached

himself to him, pouring into his ears a constant string of protest and complaint.

"I'm damn sick of being Butt's dog-robber; I'm damn sick of making out payrolls, too."

"Somebody's got to do it, Babe," Jerry told him wearily. This was a repetition of what he had been hearing for two days.

"Well, let somebody else do it then," Bender cried petulantly. "I got in this man's army to drive and I'm going to."

"You'd better be satisfied," Jerry warned him. "You don't hear any one singing for joy when he's ordered out, do you? Besides, if you want action, you're just as likely to find it back here in headquarters. Look at Hitchy. He was the boy who was going to fight or wear bars, but he couldn't see any fight coming so he trails off to get himself fitted to some whipcord pants, and see what happened. We haven't stopped since. Your turn will come, too."

"At headquarters!" Bender sneered.

"An air-raid or something," Jerry said vaguely.

The boy answered with a burst of expletive, somehow shocking, coming from his young lips. "I want you to do something for me, Jerry, old kid," he wheedled. "Just ask the loot if I can't drive. You stand in with him, I know you do. I put it up to Dale, but he told me to go to hell, and I asked Oscar to say a word, but he can't see

anything but that cross he's going to get, so now it's up to you. I've got to drive, Jerry," he said desperately. "I've just got to. If I don't, I can't write home. It makes me ashamed." His voice broke; his eyes were pleading, like a girl's, Jerry thought. He came to a sudden decision.

"No, by God, I won't!" he said more sharply than he had meant. "The loot says you can't drive and he's right. He isn't thinking of your hide as much as the men you've got to haul. I like you, Babe, but I'd hate to have a belly wound and be in the car you were driving. We'd end up in a stone wall."

Bender's face grew white and he turned away. Now Jerry could not see him, but he knew that he was weeping.

"He's like a fly," he said to himself after a moment of compunction, "always buzzing around. I can't help it if this isn't the birthday party he expected. After all, it's not my fault. Every man's got to stand on his own feet."

He went slowly into the barn and prepared for sleep. The week had not been easy and his nerves were raw. This business of seeing men mutilated no longer had an iota of romance for him; it was a brutal, bloody affair. He thought, as they all did, that if he were in another service where men were healthy, at least for a while, it might be easier. But those who envied the ambulance service forgot that

the drivers saw nothing but maimed, the wreckage of the conflict. In the infantry, in aviation, with the guns, men were solacing themselves with the same or similar reasoning, but Jerry did not know this. Above all else, he needed sleep.

Sleep, however, did not come. He lay there on his back, thinking reluctantly of young Babe, who could not bend the world to his desires, and of Hitchcock who had more force. A man was reading in a corner of the barn, a candle beside him, and Jerry was irritated by the light. He flung an arm across his eyes, but still he did not sleep.

Presently Renée came and sat beside him. He knew that it was Renée although her face was turned away. He wanted to speak to her, but his lips were numb. Then she took him by the hand and led him by one of those transferences of thought which are natural in dreams, into a glade filled with green light and the gold of a setting sun. She turned to him, and it was no longer Renée, but his girl of the woods. And now he could talk. But smiling, the girl checked the eager words on his lips. Then Jerry knew that they had no need for speech. She was not a stranger, but some one he had always known. This glade was a place familiar from another dream, years ago. The girl had dropped his hand and was moving away; her face was sad, and he knew she had to go. At once the green light was gone, and the glade was bleak. Jerry awoke with a

cry. Men about him were breathing heavily, their bodies hunched under blankets. The barn was dark and cold.

For days after, he carried the memory of this vision with him to dressing-stations, across empty shell-swept plains, and to hospitals where grumbling orderlies received his stretcher cases, casually holding cups of coffee to the lips of living and dead alike, in the hope that the sergeant in charge might be deceived and the bodies be passed into the wards where another burial squad, not they, would have the task of digging graves.

It was a comfort to remember those absurd, dream-like moments when the girl had held his hand. It helped him to retain his sense of humor in his quarrels with the French—those daily struggles to get the proper number of blankets in exchange for those left at hospitals, and the fights for so much as a glass of wine at a hospital late at night without the necessary *bon* signed by the French lieutenant.

Renée had become wan; there were blue shadows under her eyes, and her shoulders drooped. For the moment, her walks with Jerry had stopped and when he spoke to her, it was only in hurried civility. He pleaded his need for rest, the pressure of work from the great battle raging at the front, but Renée suspected another woman. And yet she could not understand. He seldom visited Eplessier, and

he was not seen there with Monique Pinceloup and those others who gave themselves for a night of pleasure in a desperate effort to forget. If he were tired, Renée reasoned, then he needed her the more.

The French girl knew now that she loved the American. She, who had lived for three years in the ruck of war, at whose farm perhaps a thousand men had stayed, was touched at last. Why, she did not know nor did she care. It might have begun with his indifference, the pleasantly detached manner with which he had regarded her, but that was forgotten now. She cared for nothing, and nothing mattered save to stand at an upper window looking down on his dark head as he moved about his car, hoping for the white smile with which he sometimes looked up.

Jerry sensed this in her, and was disturbed. She was pretty, a soft, warm creature of flesh and blood; he was ardent and they both were young. But he was held back from what he wanted by the memory of a dream. He would hardly admit this to himself, being ashamed, and no one else knew. To the outfit he was simply Jerry Tower, who worked hard, and drank harder, when he could get it, who cursed and laughed and loved, greedy for life which, by its uncertainty, had become so rare.

There was on the edge of the Forest of Villers-Cotterets a hospital to which were taken men who

had been gassed. In the hospital system arranged near the lines by the French Army, patients were divided roughly according to their wounds and assigned accordingly. Fractures went here, intestinal and chest injuries went there, the *eclopés* or "lame ducks" who had anything from tonsilitis to boils, went somewhere else, and to Vertefeuille went the gassed. The system worked admirably in theory, although in practice it frequently did not work at all.

Vertefeuille consisted of some wooden sheds with corrugated roofing and a larger number of tents, and it was stationed conveniently near the lines in order that the gassed men, many of whom were only slightly touched, might be returned expeditiously to the maw from which they had escaped. The Americans were always glad of this assignment. It meant that they could drive back quickly to headquarters, where they were allowed to sleep until their next turn out.

There were two men in Jerry's car this night who had been in the path of a gas shell, bursting in a village called Berry. Their lungs had not been affected, but the mustard had burned them severely in places, so that already large, white welts filled with liquid had risen. Between their muttered curses at the jouncing of the car, they talked gayly together at the excellent luck which had been theirs. They could count, they thought, on at least

two weeks out of the lines if the doctor were *humain*. From the driver's seat, Jerry could hear them.

They had passed the narrow strip of woods that separated Vertefeuille from the plain, and then the hospital was in sight. A waning moon turned the tents a misty gray and cast long shadows from the forest athwart them. Jerry glanced at his watch. It was half past one; he would be back at Hautefontaine by two. He turned from the highway and drove into the earth-beaten square about which the tents and sheds were arranged. A sergeant came forward and Jerry made his report.

"*Deux assis*," he said, and motioned away the stretcher-bearers in the background who would not be needed since these were sitting wounded. The men were already clambering out of the back of the car, but stiffly, and with many a loud groan, to impress the sergeant with the gravity of their ills. The sergeant was unimpressed. He glanced in a perfunctory manner at the tags fastened to their blouses and ordered them into the nearest shed. They spoke to Jerry as they went, thanking him for the ride and wishing him luck. He saw them clearly under the pale moon as they disappeared. In spite of their pain, they were smiling twisted smiles of relief.

"Could I have a drink of wine?" Jerry asked. "I am thirsty and this night air is cold."

The sergeant bargained like a true Frenchman.
"Have you a cigarette?"

Jerry gave him one and took another for himself. They lighted them from the same *briquet*. "Come," said the sergeant; "I have wine in my tent." His voice was cordial—the American had still more cigarettes. They walked together over the hard, brown earth.

The Frenchman had for himself near the entrance to the tent, a cot bed, with beside it a wooden box, on which were scattered shaving materials and reports—the inevitable reports without which an army does not function. The rest of the tent was given over to gassed men who lay on stretchers and shivered at the dampness of the ground striking up.

A canteen was produced and two tin mugs which the sergeant filled. They clicked them to murmured toasts, and Jerry permitted the first acid gulp to trickle down his throat, his head thrown back. Then he paused doubtfully and looked at the sergeant; the sergeant was looking at him. Suddenly, the air was filled with a humming sound, an intermittent roar that grew louder. The Frenchman shook his head and tried to smile, but his smile was only a strained contortion of muscles which showed his teeth white in the moonlight filtering through the flap.

"Ours?" His lips formed the word, but Jerry

did not hear it. A roar, terrifying in its suddenness, had torn apart the night. There was the ripping of iron sheeting like silk that is slit, and the splintering of wood. Perceptible tremors ran through the hard earth and cracks appeared. The sides of the tent billowed like sails in a squall.

For an instant, there was silence save for the intermittent hum above, and then a dreadful clamor broke out. It was cut short, stifled, in another shocking roar. The sergeant had gone from the tent like a blue shadow. Jerry could see him running toward a field, his head bent, his hands outstretched. In the tent, men were struggling to their feet, flinging aside the blankets which held them back. Those who could not move, cowered down close to their stretchers and the earth.

The daze that had held Jerry passed, and he ran, too. From the field, he saw a dark shape that swept overhead in widening circles, then he looked away. An anti-aircraft gun from another field went into tardy action, the phosphorus of its tracer bullets pale against the moon. Twice more, bombs were dropped and the crashing of them blotted out the distant, intolerable screaming. Then the roar of the motor rose; the plane was no longer brushing the treetops. Those who watched could see it for an instant against the moon-swept sky, then it disappeared into the east.

Those who had hidden in the woods and fields

were running again, toward the hospital now. For the next hour, Jerry did not pause to think. One of the bombs had completely demolished the largest shed; it lay there, its uprights broken, a crumpled mass of wood and tin. One end of another shed was gone, and a tent. The fourth bomb had landed in the middle of the square so that in the hard-packed ground, there was now a crater and churned clods of earth.

Save as a distant impression, unrelated to the scene, none of the men was conscious of all the damage. There was more pressing work at hand. Fire had started in one of the demolished buildings, and they fought it with earth clawed up in frantic haste by bare hands, for underneath the débris, men still lived and moaned.

They carried out the bodies and lay them in an even row beneath the shadow of two great trees which fringed the forest. Twenty-seven had been found. There were wounded also, but in the confusion there was no means of counting them. A man would be lying in the short, wet grass, his face buried in his hands, and when the orderlies hurried up with bandages, it would be found that he was only one of those who previously had been gassed. With pathetic optimism, men's hopes rose—perhaps, after all, the toll was not so great.

The last body Jerry found was of one of the men whom he had brought in during the night—the

youngest, a good-natured, smiling fellow who had hoped for two weeks' rest, if the doctor was *humain*. He was not smiling now, but lay at the end of the line of quiet soldiers, more rigid than they had ever been on parade, and stared with open eyes at the blank moon. Some one for decency's sake brought a blanket and tossed it over him. The body was quite naked, as it had stood before the doctor for examination. Of the doctor whose stethoscope had pressed against those lungs, no trace could be found.

At dawn, Jerry drove into the courtyard of Hautefontaine. A red sun was rising above the hills behind which the Germans sat. He could not bear to look at the bloody sun. All the world was red with blood. Vertefeuille, that place of green leaves, had been spattered with it. There was blood on the white pine boardings, and it had smeared the sides of tents. There was blood on his own uniform, and on his hands. He closed his eyes against the redness of the sun, swaying with nausea and fatigue.

Men from the section were not yet awake, and there was nobody about. Jerry sat down on the steps of the farmhouse. He lighted a cigarette and threw it away. He and the sergeant had been smoking from this pack when the first bomb fell. In his heart, resentment and hate were flooding up. Those men who had died had done their bit; they

were casualties, out of the line. It was not fair nor just; the pathos of their deaths choked him.

The door behind him opened, and Renée stood looking down. He turned wearily, and she saw his hands. The nails had been worn to the quick, and were oozing blood. There was blood on his clothes, too. The face he raised to her was a gray mask of dust, only the eyes alive. She exclaimed with pity as he stood up, then she drew him into the house.

Jerry sat in a chair while she brought him water from the kitchen. She was washing his hands, his face, ignoring his protests, while his eyelids drooped. Then she was pressing a cup of wine to his lips. He closed his eyes against the redness of it, and drank. It coursed, warm and tingling, through him.

She asked no questions while he told her what had happened, but she murmured softly her pity.

"And he thought he was going to live," Jerry said of the man he had carried. "It's cruel. He had earned his chance." He began to swear, but the French words he knew were inadequate, and he cursed deeply, slowly, in English, damning the Germans for what they had done. Renée had pushed away the basin of reddened water, but she still knelt beside him.

"Yes, my dear, yes, yes," she whispered, her eyes upon his bitter, tired face. She swayed slowly back and forth, as if to soothe him and the *fauteuil* on which he was sitting swayed also.

Slowly his rage died in listlessness. "It's the war," Jerry muttered in the constant expression of French resignation.

Renée nodded. "For those poor ones at Vertefeuille, it is no longer war."

"Are you sorry, Renée?" Jerry asked.

"I am sorry for you," she said.

He saw her then for the first time. She was dressed in something gray, and her face was pale. Delicate shadows were drawn under her gray eyes, wet with tears. "She could weep the tears I cannot," he thought. In spite of the work she did, her hands were soft as they touched his. She was faint, illusive. There was about her nothing, no violent color, to remind him of his night.

Jerry leaned toward her. "You're sweet," he whispered in English. "You are sweet." Her arms had risen about his neck, and then his lips pressed hers. He closed his eyes against the softness of her throat, and in the tranquillity of her presence, his memories of Vertefeuille began to fade.

She rose at last and opened the door into another room. It was darkened and at one end of it stood a bed.

"You must sleep here," Renée said quite simply. "There will be no noise. I will call you before the men awake."

Renée had three days in which to bind Jerry to her. She used no arts nor subterfuges save those

dictated by her simple nature. Loving him and believing herself loved in return, still she sought to please him in the ways which would be pleasing to men of her own commune. She learned to identify his car, and placed anonymously in the back of it gifts—unsweetened cakes, the dried fruits from her grandmother's storeroom and a flask of cognac which she had trudged into Eplessier to buy, because of the legend that all Americans liked it.

Jerry was embarrassed by these gifts, and touched. Having no money, and little imagination as to what would appeal to a girl like Renée, he had nothing to offer in return. Had he given her merely one of the poppies that were running like fire through the wheat, she would have been more than recompensed, but such an offering would not have occurred to him.

But he was pleased, and moreover, he was grateful that the girl made no attempt to search him out. Indeed, with delicacy, she had ceased watching him from an upper window so that the story spread that she had become indifferent, and others in the section redoubled their attentions, hoping for the favors Jerry had lost, not knowing what they were.

He came to her when he could, which was not often, as the battle had risen to a tumultuous crescendo, and he was unable to see her alone. Always her grandmother or one of the Americans was about. There was time only for a hurried word, a

smile and the pressure of their fingers in parting. To Jerry, in his simplicity, it seemed sufficient; there was the whole summer before them for further meetings, if he lived that long, but Renée's attention grew strained, concentrated on the officers who came and went, as if she would read their minds. Troops had been quartered at Haute-fontaine before.

And on the third day, announcement was made. "We're going *en repos*," Lieutenant Butt said to those men who were not working at the front. The phrase meant rest billets, and all the men understood. In their brief association with the French, they were already speaking a bastard language wherein *couvertures* were used instead of blankets, *blessés* carried instead of wounded, and some two dozen other words and phrases had been added to their vocabularies. The English equivalents had been dropped.

"When?" some one asked skeptically.

"Within an hour," the lieutenant answered. "A new division is taking over the lines now." He himself did not believe it.

For a man who had completed his education and was now engaged in seeing the world, he confessed to himself that he was seeing very little, and had a tremendous amount of work for his pains. But he was glad to announce this news to his men. They had said bitterly, in his hearing, that they were

never to be taken from the lines, that a year from now would see them in the same place. They acted, without infringing any of the regulations by which the officer is protected, as if he were directly responsible for their discomfort, and so now he felt a certain satisfaction in discrediting them.

A faint cheer arose and duffle began to be packed. Almost at once, stray ambulances began coming in from the front. The men were grimy, and red-eyed and bent with fatigue, but at the news, their sagging shoulders straightened. This awful grind, day in, day out, of fifteen, twenty and twenty-five hours at the wheel of a car, was over at last.

Not within the hour specified by the lieutenant but before two hours, the train of twenty ambulances led by the officer's car and trailed by the Quad truck, drove out of the courtyard of Haute-fontaine and down into the highway. When they had come in, the cars were new, the paint unmarred; the drivers fresh and eager for the great adventure. Now the cars were battered, and the men who drove them were veterans without curiosity, without eagerness for anything save rest.

At the last moment, Jerry had hurried to the farmhouse. He knew that Renée was not there, some errand having sent her to Eplessier, but he wished to leave his farewell. He saluted Madame Collette with the respectful awe which he always felt for her. He had been dubious as to the possi-

bility of the letter's reaching Renée unread, and so he had written simply, "I do not know where we are going, but if it is possible, I will come back."

"Would you give this to Mademoiselle Renée?" he asked.

The old woman took the letter. Jerry extended his hand. "*Au revoir, Madame*," he said. "And thank you."

Madame Collette did not take his hand, but she leaned forward, her sunken, black eyes peering into his. "Monsieur, can you be trusted?" she asked, her voice intense.

Jerry imagined that she was speaking of Renée, and he could feel the color rising in his face. "I hope so, Madame," he answered.

Then as she did not speak again, he turned away. When he had reached his car, already in line, he turned. She was looking, not at him, but at the hilltop known as Maison Rouge.

"What did the old nut say to you?" Cassidy, whose car was in front of Jerry's, asked.

"She asked me if I could be trusted," Jerry answered, in an unconsidered moment.

Cassidy's eyes became intent with interest. "What did you say?"

"I said yes."

"You're a damn liar," Cassidy announced with conviction. "I wouldn't trust you with my grandmother. Listen, Jerry, we're going to Vivières."

Jerry cranked his car and got in.

"Vivières. Where's that?"

"You can search me," Cassidy said. "There's a rumor that it's near Paris. Soft beds, hard liquor and mademoiselles. Oh, boy, can you tie it?"

The column began rolling slowly down the hill. No one turned to look back at Hautefontaine. Rest billets at last. From one driver to another, the magic name sped: Vivières!

PART THREE

A DESOLATE plain lay on one side of the road, on the other stretched fields which had once contained wheat, but now were filled only with ugly dry stubble. The village, without form or reason, straddled the highway, as if a disgusted hand had spilled it there to languish and die. There was no logical beginning to it and no end. Behind each house stood a manure pile, smoking in the sun, about which flies swarmed with an endless drone. Within each house crawled every species of insect known to man from spiders to common trench lice. They deposited their eggs and spawned. There was a square on which stood two shops, an *epicerie* and a *buvette*. Above the *buvette* was displayed an ironic sign bearing the legend, "*Vins fine et ordinaire*," but there was no wine of any quality, for both shops had been closed. There was, however, water. Beyond the square was a pond, stagnant now and covered with a green slime across which insects with insanely long legs skidded, while above swarms of mosquitoes filled the air. The smell rising from the pond was such that those obliged to

pass that way clutched their noses and hurried on with shortened breath.

There were no women in this town. If ever beauty had emerged from these doorways, a thought difficult to believe, it had long since gone away. In place of the civilians a regiment of Senegalese inhabited most of the houses, very black men who washed their feet in their helmets, neglecting to go farther, and made night hideous with the beating of drums. In one house as far removed from the Africans as possible the American ambulance section were quartered, where they suffered, crowded together, but not in silence. In bold black letters on the last house in the village was painted the word *Vivières*.

It was sunset of the ninth day since the Americans had been brought to this place for their long-anticipated rest. Nine long days under a sun blazing for once from a cloudless sky, fighting insects or worse, for the village was swarming with rats, and nine long nights cramped together listening to the barbarities of the Senegalese had brought the section's morale to a low ebb. A dozen of the men were gathered around the door of the house, squatting listlessly on their heels while they cursed the Germans, the French and their own officer impartially. From the desolate garden behind the house came sounds of cooking, but it aroused no interest

in the men. Not being on active duty they had been transferred to a diet of beans.

A truck stopped at the further end of the village and then rumbled through, filling the air with clouds of stinging white dust. From out this dust emerged a figure carrying a *musette* slung over his shoulder—a man who walked slowly down the street, pausing now and again before a house only to be greeted by black faces thrust from windows who shouted comments in an unintelligible jargon. The man with the *musette* seemed footsore and his spine was bent at a weary angle.

As he came nearer it was seen that he wore an American uniform and then one with eyes less dust-filled than the rest cried:

“It’s Hitchcock!”

“Go on,” said Cannon. “He’s sleeping between sheets at Meaux.”

“I’d know that shape if I saw it in China,” Roper insisted. “Officers’ shoulders. Ha!” He spat into the dust. Very tall and thin and being known as “Reed” Roper he had no admiration for Hitchcock’s military build.

“Has he got bars on ‘em?” a man inquired ominously. They resolved then and there that if Hitchcock as an officer was returning to witness their misery they would kill him on the spot.

The limping figure came closer and they saw that there were no bars on the shoulders and no braid on

the sleeves. The uniform was the usual O.D. issue, rough and ill cut. A chorus of greetings broke out:

“Hello, Hitchy.”

“What t’ell you doing here?”

“Did you get a majority or are you just a plain loot?”

Hitchcock grinned painfully and tossed off his sack. Ever since he had left Meaux this interview had hung over him like a nemesis which he could not escape. He would rather have faced a court-martial than his former friends, but there was no way to avoid them. So he resolved to carry it off with a casual air. “ ‘Lo, gang,’ he said. “Well, here I am. Have you got a place for a buck private to sleep?” He fostered his assurance with a laugh, but into his red-brown eyes crept a look of humiliation in spite of their steady gaze.

The comments, the coarse raillery, cut him to the quick, but still he grinned, facing them.

“What happened, Royal?” Jerry asked quietly.

“Well, you see it was this way,” Hitchcock began his apology. “All the future lieutenants in that school are sergeants or officers’ pets. The outsiders like myself didn’t have a show in. We were just there to fill up and everyone knew we didn’t have a chance from the first. But I stuck and at that I didn’t do so badly in exams.” His gay voice had taken on a faintly defiant note.

“What happened?” Jerry asked again.

"They said I wasn't officer stuff," Hitchcock said almost in a gasp. "And so they flunked me."

"That's too bad," said some one. Silence fell upon the group.

"And so I've come back. I could have gotten transferred permanently to the school, I guess; they've got to have some privates to pick up cigarette butts and there was a pretty decent sergeant major who might have fixed it, but I was through. I guess there's not so much in being an officer and after all you're my crowd. I'd rather stick with you out here than wear all the bars going."

Hitchcock stopped speaking; his unwavering eyes looked at the group, but no one was looking at him. Each man there was thinking, "He didn't say that when he went away."

The silence continued; it grew oppressive as if suddenly the air were weighted with the hush of an approaching storm. Then from the garden a clamor broke out. The beating of an iron spoon on tin. A voice was announcing, "Come and get it." Relieved, the men scrambled to their feet, pushing each other, breaking for the doorway in their rush for mess.

"Going to eat?" Jerry asked.

Royal Hitchcock shook his head. "I've been eating chocolate all the way out," he admitted. "My *musette* is full of it. Now I think I'll look over the town. Want to come? If you are hungry you can eat chocolate. What are they serving anyway?"

"Only beans," Jerry answered. "All right, I'll come."

They walked together down the one street past the houses where negroes with great white teeth shining like headlights in the dusk lolled from windows and gaped after the Americans.

"Ugly looking devils," Hitchcock observed. "I see they've got the *fourragère*. How do the Southerners in the outfit take to them?"

"They don't exactly fraternize," Jerry said dryly. "These babies are smeared with decorations—they are mean fighters with the knife. But you'll know more of 'em later. From ten on they make night hideous. I got close enough once to see some of their dances—The War Dance and The Dance of the Bad Women. Oh, boy, I'm telling you, you never saw anything rougher in a house of sin. But it's a damn shame putting white men next to them. These are rest billets, God help us."

"I suppose you saw some action," Hitchcock said dully.

"Action? I'll say we did," Jerry cried. "Up over that hill to Berry and Hors for hours at a stretch. The Boche have been pushing us hard. And at Vertefeuille I saw—" He launched into an account of their experiences.

"It's just my luck," Hitchcock muttered. "But I'm here to tell you, boy, that I'm not through." His voice grew firmer. "No, by God, I haven't be-

gun. You say Holmburg got a *croix* and Cassidy was cited? Well, I'm going to get a decoration too. I've decided that after the war a cross is going to mean more than being an officer. Why, the average civilian won't know whether an officer was at Château Thierry or Camp Dix, but a decoration—that will mean something."

"I suppose it will sell real estate," Jerry said, his voice in spite of himself faintly ironic.

"Yes, sir, it will," Hitchcock answered defiantly. "This war isn't going to be as easy as I thought. These spring drives have taught me that, and the men who go home are going to get a lot of glory out of it. Well, it's no crime to be ambitious and I am. I'm going to found my future on what I do over here."

"I wish I saw things that clearly," Jerry said almost with envy. Hitchcock was confident, he was hard. In the end he would win, Jerry was sure. But was what he wanted worth anything?

They had reached the square where the *buvette* stood, closed. Across the way the pond lay deceptively fresh and cool in the faint light.

"Water," said Hitchcock with pleasure, his voice no longer strained. "I think if the blacks don't use it I'll take a bath to-morrow."

"You want to stay away from that," Jerry warned him. "I think there's a dead cow or something at the bottom. Smell."

In the faint breeze they sniffed the putrefying, deadly odor that crept toward them. At once they began to walk away.

"And you say we get beans for every meal?" Hitchcock asked thoughtfully.

"It would have been better for you if you had been made an officer," Jerry said. "It's hell to be a private in this man's army where you've got to accept the special favors they hand you, like rest billets and beans."

They had reached headquarters again and stood for a moment before the open door. In the faint candlelight that streamed out into the darkness they could see four men crouched over a game of cards. In the distance the tomtoms of the Senegalese had begun, a hollow mournful throbbing. The high spirit that had sustained Hitchcock began to fade; his red-brown eyes and straight shoulders still expressed assured calm, but within himself he felt lonely and alone. The bitterness of his defeat hung heavy on him.

"The gang don't like me," he said to Jerry, motioning to the men within. "I know it and I can stand it. But I didn't think it would be that way with you."

"What do you mean?" Jerry asked.

"It was a hell of a warm welcome I got this afternoon," Hitchcock said. "Not one of 'em shook hands with me—not even you."

Jerry extended his hands in the candlelight, the fingers spread apart. "Nothing of the sort, you damn fool," he said irritably. "I've got *la galle*."

Looking, Hitchcock could see the scabby sores between the fingers, red from scratching.

"It's a French disease and a rotten one," Jerry explained. "It comes from dirty billets and it's passed on by shaking hands. I've got it on my legs too."

"I'm sorry," said Hitchcock. "I didn't understand."

They entered the house. Already men were sleeping on stretchers placed against the wall. The card players hardly glanced up.

"You're all right, Hitchy," Jerry said more cordially. "But don't take your troubles too seriously, we've got our troubles too."

On the empty stretcher in one corner which he had found for himself, Hitchcock pondered Jerry's use of the words "your" and "we." Jerry had meant his advice kindly, but there was no community of interest there. The line between Hitchcock and the rest of the section had been clearly drawn. A wave of despair swept over him. Instead of lying he had told these men the true story of the bitterest tragedy of his life, but they had not understood. He remembered that he had already written home of his assignment to Meaux and the reason for it, but he thrust that thought away.

"War is just another sort of opportunity for a man to advance. I *will* make good," he whispered to comfort himself. Then he closed his eyes very tight and drew the blanket about his head to shut out the loneliness and the beating of the drum.

There comes a time when bad food, bad quarters and monotony, but especially the last, rise and stick in a man's throat until he will do anything to escape. Prisoners suffer this, and exiles. At that moment when the fine cord of restraint snaps the man is not responsible. This moment came to Jerry on the fourteenth day of their rest.

The sun still shone from an utterly cloudless sky, the insects still multiplied and the heavy stench still rose, almost visible, in that village of desolation. The men lay about the sere garden or sat on the steps of the house, gasping under the blanket of heat. Jerry felt slightly ill; his head was reeling and he had observed while washing this morning that he looked white about the lips. He had not shaved because there was not enough water in his canteen and there was only one well at a distance from which water might be drawn. All the other wells in the village were marked with signs reading, *Eau infecte*, and orders against using them for any purpose were stringent. It seemed too much effort to walk that distance for fresh water; he decided to wait.

Lieutenant Butt occupied a room at one end of the house as far removed from the kitchen and his men as possible. Outside his room stood one dying pear tree whose scanty foliage cast a slight shade upon the ground. At any rate it was cooler than the full sun and there was less dust from passing trucks. To this spot Jerry went and stretched himself beneath the tree.

He closed his eyes for a time, but the dizziness seemed to increase. Presently he opened them and looked up. Lieutenant Butt was sitting in the window of his room. His tunic was off and his blouse; he was dressed solely in an undershirt, and socks which were plainly visible since his feet rested on the sill. Without his uniform he looked curiously unmilitary and meager. As Jerry looked one long, white arm reached down to the floor and appeared again, the hand grasping a bottle. This Lieutenant Butt raised to his lips and drank from it deeply. The other hand produced a folded newspaper with which he began to fan himself. He closed his eyes and sighed, an audible sound, perhaps in memory of the comforts of home.

Jerry choked. At once the officer's eyes flew open and he gazed intensely at the sky as if he had been caught in this unconventional pose by a passing plane. Then he looked down. A deep flush rose on his cheek-bones.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

Jerry struggled to his feet. "Nothing, sir," he said meekly.

"That's no excuse at all," the lieutenant declared. He remembered his costume. "Stay where you are," he ordered. Presently he reappeared in coat and breeches. "Just because I treat you men like human beings you think you can bust into an officer's room without his leave. I'm going to have this side of the house declared out of bounds. It's a little too much to have men snooping around here."

Jerry felt his ears grow hot. "I wasn't snooping, sir," he protested. "I was resting."

"You've no right to rest until you're fit to be seen," cried the lieutenant with rising passion. "Look at yourself. Shirt open, spirals coming off." He leaned out. "Have you shaved? No, you have not. Just because you haven't any drill to occupy you all discipline has gone to hell. Don't let me see you again until your face is clean, and never on this side of the house. Send Sergeant Dale to me. You're dismissed."

He sank back exhausted by this effort and without returning the private's salute.

Jerry's dizziness had gone, its place taken by a growing rage out of all proportion to the incident. "I can't help it if I caught him in his shirt," he thought. "My God, he looks like a white angle

worm. Discipline! A lot he knows about that word."

He fetched water from the distant well and shaved his face twice. Then he cleaned his shoes and rewound his spirals with meticulous care. "Now I guess I'm fit to be seen," he said.

Without speaking to any one he left the house and walked to the end of the town. The poisonous water and the odorous blacks still infected the air, but Jerry was indifferent to them. "I'll have one day of freedom," he said to himself. "Anything he can do is worth it."

A camion thundered through bound for Villers-Cotterets and Jerry stopped it. "I'm on a mission. Here's a cigarette. Take two," he said to the acquiescent driver.

They drove on. The pestilential village on the plain faded beneath white dust; ahead the forest of Villers rose cool and green. Jerry's feeling of sickness disappeared and his spirits were lighter than they had been in days. He knew that at Villers-Cotterets he could get another truck for Eplessier. Within two hours he should be at Hautefontaine.

Renée was not at the house when he arrived. She was, the grandmother told him, working in the lower field from whence presently she would return, and the old woman held him in conversation in spite of his obvious desire to escape. They exchanged compliments politely, and Jerry sipped a

glass of her wine. The talk turned as usual to the war.

"How long will it last?" Madame Collette asked abruptly.

Jerry did not know.

"Are you a volunteer?" she inquired then.

"Of course," he returned proudly. "We are not *engagés*."

"One fights because one has to, not because it is a pleasure," the old woman said slowly. "I do not understand Americans. What does America fight for?"

"To beat the Boche," Jerry said promptly, and noticed the quizzical look in her eyes. He tried to tell her then something of the idealism that might animate a people for a just cause, but he faltered over sentences in French which dealt only with abstractions, and it was evident either that she did not understand or that she was amused.

"What does the war mean to you, Madame?" he asked a trifle defiantly.

She hesitated so long that he thought she had not heard.

"The right to grow my cabbages," she said at last.

It seemed to him then as dull-witted a reply as she could make. "She's so close to the soil that she can think only in terms of vegetables," he thought, and stood up.

"Mademoiselle Renée is coming up the road," he told her grandmother. "I am going to meet her."

"Your eyes are keen. Go then," said Madame Collette with unexpected cordiality. "Some time, Monsieur, when you come again I may ask a favor."

"I may not come again. War is uncertain," Jerry answered.

"Ah, but you will come, I know it," she said confidently.

He left curious as to the favor which she might ask. As she stood up to bid him good-by he noticed that a cane was by her chair. That, he thought, was something new and it occurred to him that if he did return to Hautefontaine she might not be there.

Presently in his pleasure at seeing Renée he forgot about her grandmother. The girl walked beside him, cool and pale, openly happy in his presence.

"But you did not write, Jarrie," she said in gentle reproach. "Are there no posts in France?" Her way of pronouncing his name with softened sound was a delight.

"I could not. You see we have been fighting Senegalese," he said gayly.

"*N'importe*," she whispered, not understanding, but content.

They found their accustomed spot by the brook where there was a rock to sit on. The midday sun

cast a golden haze over the valley of the Aisne and in the summer drowse the guns were still. All about Hautefontaine spread fields yellow with ripening wheat and through the fields the poppies ran like streams of shining red.

They told each other all that had happened since they parted fifteen days before. Vivières and Jerry's revolt became things to laugh at. Their young laughter mingled together, mocking Lieutenant Butt.

"He had the appearance of a white—" Jerry hesitated, not knowing the word "worm" in French.

"Speak English," Renée urged him. "I study it now."

That surprised the American. It was the first time he had ever heard Renée show any interest in a language not her own. "Well, you are up and coming!" he exclaimed. "Back in the States I'd say 'the kid's got class.' "

Renée shook her head in bewilderment. "*Pas compris*," she said. They laughed again.

The sun found them out beneath their tree and cast a warm veil on them. They grew sleepy, and silent. Jerry slipped his arm about Renée's waist and she leaned against his shoulder. He bent toward her and she raised her lips to his, smiling, her eyes half closed.

It was late afternoon when they walked together

arm in arm to Eplessier. The guns had begun again, their evening song, and the air was filled with the soft wavering roll.

"And you must go back!" Renée exclaimed. "To that dirty place, and later the front. Ah, my poor boy!" For an instant her face was distraught and she clutched his arm because she could not see. But a moment later she was calm again.

"It is nothing," Jerry answered. "You have made me forget it. After all compared to you—" He broke off.

"But it has not been bad for us," Renée answered, understanding him. "Except for the great retreat and the loss of my *dot*. I must tell you of my *dot*—it was taken by a spy—five thousand francs." She told the story.

Jerry listened gravely without comment. In his mind he was computing how much they had lost.

"But it's not a great deal," he thought, translating it into dollars. "That was bad luck," he said aloud.

"Should I have told him that?" Renée asked herself in sudden anxiety. "He says so little, but what man could be indifferent?" She wanted to add that there would be more, that Hautefontaine itself was worth much money, but timidity and her pride would not permit.

They passed a girl on the Place Bucot whose skin was sallow and whose brilliant eyes were hag-

gard. "*Bon jour, Renée,*" she said and smiled sarcastically. "A soldier at last."

"One is better than many, Monique," Renée retorted.

They waited five minutes until a truck driven by an Annamese and bound for Villers-Cotterets came through. Monique Pinceloup had lingered, affecting not to see them, glancing into a shop window, but always close. Renée ignored her.

As always the driver of the camion was willing to take a passenger along for the price of a few American cigarettes. Jerry kissed Renée while from a distance the other girl watched.

"You will come again?" she asked, her voice imploring.

"If I can," he answered, and she was too good a soldier to ask more. He left her in the center of the square, waving until the truck was out of sight.

Monique Pinceloup sauntered up to Renée. "He is of the ambulance section from Hautefontaine, is he not?" she inquired.

"You shall not have him!" Renée whispered furiously. "Keep away."

Monique turned to go. "I only wanted to send a message to his officer," she said, and Renée knew she had begun to weep.

For a moment Renée stood there irresolute, and then she hurried after the lost girl. She slipped an arm about her waist.

"*Pauvre chérie,*" she cried, her voice warm. "Are you in love too?"

It was dusk when Jerry arrived again at Vivières. With forethought he left the truck on the outskirts of the town and strolled in across the barren fields as if taking a walk through the stubble was his usual twilight practice. The men were still lolling before the door of American headquarters, speaking intermittently, and staring with blank indifferent eyes along the straight white road. They were thoroughly sick of their unwelcome rest, so different from what they had imagined. Jerry's absence had not been noticed except by Sergeant Dale and he placed another interpretation on it.

"I suppose you've found a quiet place to sleep," he said. "You might let me in on it."

"Here's where friendship ceases," said Jerry, and wondered whether he had been caught. "I'll sell you my secret, sergeant, but I won't give it away."

"You must have been well hidden," Dale continued amiably. "I've been looking for you for an hour. The loot wants you to take a sick nigger to Pierrefonds."

Cries of protest arose from the men who had been listening:

"Take me, sarge."

"I'll go."

"This guy Tower gets all the lucky breaks."

"Shut up," said the sergeant. "Those are the loot's orders. Do you want to go?" he asked Jerry.

"Why not to Villers?" the driver asked. "That's where we take the lame ducks." He had spent four hours riding on trucks already and he did not relish the night drive, but if he said he did not wish to go the sergeant would consider him either sick or insane. Everyone liked to go to Pierrefonds. He recognized in this gesture that Lieutenant Butt, constitutionally good-natured, was making amends for his morning lapse.

"The man's routed to Pierrefonds, that's all I know," Dale answered Jerry's question. "He's in the third house this side of the shop. Get some chow from the cook and be on your way." And so it was settled.

Jerry looked at the gas and oil in his car and then stopped before the house indicated.

"Bring out your dead," he shouted in a stentorian voice, and conspicuously held his nose when the door opened and two Senegalese brought out a third, lying on a stretcher. There was no love lost between the Americans and their allies. The sick man was of a saffron tint and his teeth chattered in the evening damp. With his rolling eyeballs and his fingers clutching the blanket about his neck he looked very ill indeed.

"Oh, glory! He's probably got yellow fever or something," Jerry said, and the unworthy thought

came to him that perhaps Lieutenant Butt had not been entirely altruistic in his choice of a driver. He did not leave his seat but directed the negroes with gestures to put the stretcher in the ambulance and close the tailboard. Then he drove away.

A new moon had risen and its pallid light flickered through the leaves of the woods which bordered his road. Jerry remembered the air-raid at Vertefeuille, but to-night the heavens were quiet. He followed a rough, winding road which required all his attention until he had reached the village of Taillefontaine where he swept into the broad highway leading to Pierrefonds. His thoughts turned back to his day with Renée. She had excited him, warming and soothing his senses at the same time. Her hands were very gentle; her mouth against his mouth was fragrant and soft.

"I think she's crazy about me," he thought in a moment of self-esteem. "I wonder if she thinks we'll get married." Anything less with Renée was impossible. Guiltily he knew that it was exactly what the girl was thinking, perhaps at this moment lying in her bed in the vast farmhouse at Hautefontaine. "Well, maybe we will," he said defiantly aloud. He tried to imagine Renée in Waynesboro, but it was too difficult. She was so perfectly the flower of her own environment, that transplanted she would fade. "What's the matter with France, then?" he continued the defense of one Jerry Tower before

an invisible bar. "I like France. Plenty of liquor and pretty girls—I mean one girl. Everybody's got to have a girl," he concluded sentimentally and began to sing, "Sweet Evalina, My Gal."

The sick Senegalese moaned piteously.

There were lights ahead, discreetly shaded from the sky, but not completely hidden. The car swept past a lone house like an outpost, then more. People were moving confidently along the street, women. There was no sign of tension here. Somebody laughed, a careless, an incredible sound. A railroad train backed and moved forward at the station to the accompaniment of escaping steam and tooting whistles. On a hill a many-turreted castle stood, white in the moonlight. This was Pierrefonds.

Jerry left the negro at the hospital, parked his car in the courtyard and started out to see the town. He noted several American officers, a new sight for Pierrefonds, whom he judged to be from a staff by their gleaming boots and jingling accoutrement. Carefully he avoided them, having learned that American ambulance drivers who wore French helmets and sheepskin coats were inevitably subject to suspicion. He sought the quiet side streets.

A *buvette* drew him and he entered. Here were Frenchmen, soldiers of his own rank, with whom he felt at ease. It was easy to join the group sitting at a beer-slopped table, easy to buy them cognac, joining in their talk. Clouds of smoke drifted over-

head obscuring the lamp swinging on brass chains. There was sawdust on the floor, thick, which deadened the sound of footsteps. A very fat and greasy woman sat behind her *caisse* and counted coins, adding interminable columns of spidery figures on thin paper. The air was warm and moist and heavy with the fumes of drink.

"I'm at home here," Jerry thought. "By God, I like France."

The soldiers talked their usual jargon of the war.

"It's a war of commerce," said one gloomily.

"For the Fatherland!" cried another indignantly.

"In any case it is bad," answered the first. "I was with Savatier at Kemmel Hill this spring. The slave-driver! Up and up over Rouge and Noir until the slopes were covered with our dead. The English too suffered. I saw their recruits—children."

"My brother was killed last week," proudly answered the man who had declared his patriotism. "His class called to the colors a year before their time. So young! But I do not complain."

"Drink up," said Jerry. "We will forget the war."

"We can not forget it," returned a man who had not spoken. "Is it true that the Americans are to take over the lines and that we are to be used on communications? It is only just."

"I do not know," Jerry answered.

"But I would rather die at the front than build

roads," shouted the poilu. "I helped build the road to Verdun in '16. Do you remember? Frightful!" He struck the table with his fist so that the glasses jumped.

"I only go on so that I may escape a *conseil de guerre*," said the gloomy one. He spoke for a time feelingly of the horrors of a French court-martial.

"If he hits the table again he'll spill more good liquor," Jerry thought, watching the patriot carefully. "Their whole war's not worth a glass of cognac." He spoke to them soothingly:

"*Mes vieux*, I am a poilu like yourselves, and I say to you that the war is a thing to laugh at, to be gay over. So only will we remain untouched. For each bad moment there is a song, a pretty girl, or this." He raised his glass. It was his fourth and a warm glow was spreading through him.

They looked at him curiously. "Is it true, you are untouched by the war?" one of them asked. "But then, you have seen nothing." He shrugged.

Jerry thought the man was imputing his courage. "I've been under shell fire," he said indignantly, "I have been in *postes de secours* where the wounded could not be moved for hours; I saw the air-raid at Vertefeuille—" Suddenly he stopped. "Oh, Lord, I'm not going to orate again," he thought. Silence fell on them.

"You will be changed," said the third man at last, "as we all have been changed. Perhaps like

Ribout here who can see no good in anything, or like Jean there whose losses have made him a little mad so that he would die on the bayonets. He thinks it is for France that he fights, but it is for his three dead brothers. You too will be changed." His voice was gently positive.

"I shall come out of it as I went in—if I come out," Jerry thought. "It's nothing to me." Aloud he said politely, "Perhaps," and ordered more drinks.

One of the Frenchmen began speaking of a matter nearer to his heart. "This sacred war," he sighed. "It hurts our bodies, comrades, and through our bodies our souls. There was a girl—" he lapsed into silence.

"Another?" one of the poilus asked mockingly.

"There was only one. Others, since then—diversions, yes. It was in Mittlach, an Alsatian village with a German name, but she was French. 'Toinette. We were stationed there—it seemed a quiet place—but one night they shot her."

"Who did that?" cried some one in a startled voice.

"Our own patrols. It is hilly country, very rough and near the front, you understand. She had wandered far seeking a cow that had calved, and the lantern she carried had blown out. Perhaps she was *distraite*, thinking of her cow, or perhaps she had not heard the challenge in the wind. It was a mis-

take of course—as if that could console those of us who cared. I did not see her again; the last time I saw her she was alive—at sunset. . . .”

Jerry heard no more. Suddenly the sense of companionship was gone; the room seemed alien and cold. There was something he had to do—something of vital importance. He pressed his head in his hands and one of the Frenchmen winked significantly, believing him drunk. When he looked up everything appeared changed. The room was bare, it stretched away infinitely long; the yellow lamp had become a sinking sun; it thrust its rays into every corner of the long room. Somewhere a voice was insistently calling.

Dazed, his head numb, Jerry stood up. The faces of the men at the table swam slowly into his vision again. “I must go,” he said vaguely. “There is something—” He turned and swaying slightly moved toward the door. Punctiliously the Frenchmen saluted his retreating back. Then economically they shared his untouched cognac.

On the street it was cool and dark for the little moon was gone behind a fleece of clouds. “I must be drunk,” Jerry thought. “Cognac is strong.”

At the station the train was still restlessly shunting back and forth on its switch and he turned that way. There was something amusing about French trains, the whistles and flag-waving, their puny

efforts. He thought of the expresses that rushed through Waynesboro.

The station had been cleared of its human freight and a pile of discarded stretchers lay in one corner. Jerry saw then that this was a hospital train, some coaches and a number of box cars. At the windows appeared white faces staring, heads bound in whiter bandages. There was an odor of disinfectants over all.

"I'll bet my Senegalese is on board," Jerry thought. "Well, he has a long trip back to blighty." The train had been moved on to the main track and he began to walk along the platform looking up. Several orderlies got off and a doctor, his blue uniform covered by a white coat. A conductor blew violently on his whistle and in the distance a flagman became an animate, violent figure. The train began to move.

Suddenly Jerry wanted to do something for those men whose tired, blank faces stared from the windows. He raised his hands above his head, shaking them together in congratulation and farewell, smiling up at the men. Some of them smiled back.

A coach was passing and framed in its open window his startled eyes saw a girl who wore a dark uniform and beneath whose little cap hair escaped, burnished like copper in the lantern light. Her eyes, clear and rainwashed, were staring down into his. As the *buvette* had faded so now the station

faded and again he was in the Y.M.C.A. hut, very new and crude, built in a glade. Unconsciously he kept pace with the train, his hand resting on the window ledge so close that he could have touched her hand.

"Do you remember me?" He did not know whether he had whispered or shouted.

Her lips formed the words, "St. Jean au Bois," and a reckless elation filled him. She had not forgotten.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Three hours," she called, louder now above the noise of the wheels. He was filled with black despair. One of those three hours he had wasted in a *café*.

The train was moving faster and Jerry was running. He had reached the end of the platform and was beyond.

"Oh, please," she begged. "You'll be hurt."

There were a thousand things he had to ask her, what her name was, what her service was, where she was going. There were other things, more intimate, which in the fleeting instant and the darkness might still be said. He asked none of them.

"I remember where I knew you now," he cried above the roar. "I dreamed about you, long ago."

Into her eyes came a startled look of remembrance as if she too had dreamed. Then the train shot forward in a burst of speed. Jerry could no

longer hold on, he could no longer run. The ground had turned rough beneath his feet. He stumbled and fell; he was rolling down the embankment, clutching at the stones. There was a tremendous and then a lesser clamor on the rails above. When he arose the train was gone and his hands and face were cut by gravel.

He found his ambulance and drove back recklessly through the darkness to Vivières. A strange mood had come upon him for he believed now that she had been waiting for him at the train and that somehow she had called him from the companionship of the poilus in the café. Shame and bitterness engulfed him. Only a few months had passed and he had forgotten so soon. He had spent the day with another girl, making love and kissing her lightly as if he had never kissed the only girl. To his distraught imagination it seemed like betrayal.

"Why, she's mine," he said to himself in a sort of wonder. "How could I forget?"

Next morning at mess there were comments on his appearance—his torn clothes, his scratched face.

"My God, what happened to you?" Judkins, who was serving the beans, asked. "You look as if you'd been sharpening a bayonet on your face."

"I got stinking drunk with a lot of poilus, and if anyone wants to know more about it he can go to Pierrefonds and find out," Jerry answered gruffly.

They did not question him further out of respect for his fists.

The day which had dawned was cloudy and by contrast with the eternal glare it affected the spirits of the men like a draught of champagne. They became gayer, more lively, and their bodies baked in sun relaxed. The dice began rolling on spread blankets and letters which had been listlessly ignored were written.

It was not so with Jerry. He sat alone on the edge of his stretcher, a pack of cards before him with which he idly tried a solitaire. He had no wish to speak or be spoken to; his cut face was sore, but it was as nothing to the pain which had been growing in his heart. He felt defrauded, by his own weakness and lack of faith as much as by the war which had tossed him and the unknown girl together again for an instant.

"I should have been watching always," he thought. "Every canteen, every hospital town. We may have been ten feet from each other a dozen times, and I not knowing it. Our meeting the first time and last night wasn't just an accident; things don't happen that way. There's a fate that moves us about for a purpose, but mostly we don't understand."

Thus ran his reflections. They did not however appeal entirely to his common sense, "No, that

isn't right. It's like this solitaire—it's just chance. I'll never see her again." It was amazing, the bitterness that overwhelmed him.

Across the room Hitchcock was asking anxiously what chance there was of an immediate advance to the front. "We ought to be going up soon," he said. "This is my fifth day here and I've had enough rest."

"Speak for yourself," said somebody comfortably. With the advent of cooler weather no one else was eager to move.

"You never did have any ambition," said Hitchcock scornfully. "I'd like a chance to get a cross like Oscar here."

It made the big mechanic uneasy, perhaps because of the memories of how his cross which hung on his chest beneath its green and red ribbon had been won, and he came across to where Jerry was sitting.

"I wish they'd give that bird a dozen croix," he muttered. "Then he might keep his mouth shut."

Jerry did not answer, having no wish to be disturbed. Holmburg squatted down on his heels beside the cards. "Whatcha doin', kid?" he asked, his voice a cheerful roar.

"Telling my fortune," said Jerry and shuffled the cards together.

Holmburg was interested. "Tell mine," he suggested. "There might be a letter from home."

Jerry tossed out six cards and then six more. "I don't see any good news for you," he said indifferently.

Holmburg's voice became somewhat strained. "Is it bad?" he asked.

"That depends," Jerry answered judiciously. "Something's going to happen to you, Oscar, and pretty quick. So far as I can make out you're going to get a slug of shrapnel in the guts the next time we go to the front."

The mechanic's voice was so altered when he spoke that Jerry looked up in surprise. Holmburg's face had turned quite white; his eyelids were drooping—almost closed. "Do I—does it get me?" he articulated faintly. "For—for good?"

Jerry stared at him; it was incredible that the man could believe what he was saying. A dim memory came to him of a talk some time—something that Holmburg had said about a butcher shop and his fear of blood, but he could not remember. Had they not been drunk? He turned over a few more cards.

"I don't know, Oscar. Yep, here's a black deuce. I guess it's curtains for you." His voice held mock sympathy.

The effect on the mechanic was unexpected. He dropped his face in his hands and when he looked up again his lips too had become very white.

"Oh, God! I knew it would come," he whispered. Then he got to his feet and went away.

"By Golly, he's afraid!" Jerry thought in astonishment. "That big, hulking brute with the tinware on his chest, and all the outfit thinks he's a fire-eater." The idea amused him for a time until he began to feel vaguely sorry for Holmburg. He decided that later after mess when he felt more like it he would find the mechanic and set his mind at rest, but he had his own problems of Renée and the unknown girl to think of and presently he forgot. At six o'clock that evening there was confusion and excitement in the camp. Orders had come to move.

It was nine o'clock before they got away in the long pale twilight that still lingered, the cars moving in a brown line stretching serpent-like across the plain. As they traveled the character of the country changed and the traffic increased. Now they were going down again through patches of woods and lush fields, through hamlets of weather-worn stone, clumps of houses that were always dark.

On the road there was confusion and long delays. Troops were moving to the lines in camions, standing crushed together under the canvas tops which had been half rolled since in the night they were in no danger from alien eyes. The Americans thought these men were members of their own

division, but they could not be sure. No insignia showed and the men were silent. Going to the front troops did not sing. At crossroads French military police tried in a futile way to direct the traffic which swelled and became unmanagable. To the camions and the ambulances were added light guns; there was the rattle of harness, and the braying of mules filled the air. On the horizon strange lights flared in broad wavering bands and the noise of guns grew, a steady rumbling monotone. Everybody was glad that to-night there was no moon.

They crossed the river on a pontoon that dipped under them, they turned at right angles to climb a steeper hill and presently they were in Le Port. In the center of the town the brigadier of the French lieutenant was waiting to lead them to their quarters. It was a battered town, torn at different periods by the guns of both armies, its houses roofless and collapsed. Below it the Aisne slipped past, dark and sullen within its banks.

There was an outburst of protest and dismay when the Americans saw their new home. The cellar in which they were to sleep dripped moisture which formed a pool in one corner. The courtyard, surrounded by a broken wall, was hardly big enough to hold the twenty-odd cars, and as for the truck it must remain in the street.

"Wait till daylight and watch them shell hell out

of us," said one. "There ought to be trees to put the cars under. The Boche may be dumb but they ain't blind."

"Is that so?" came Lieutenant Butt's voice, irritated out of its official calm. "The French are running this war and they know what they're doing."

But even his sergeant was dubious. "They're sure to spot us, sir. One car might get away with it, but not twenty-one." They appealed to the brigadier.

"Ah," said the red-mustached veteran wisely. "It is of the ambulances that you speak. Do not be disturbed. We will find camouflage to put over the tops of them. Then all will be well."

"When will we find camouflage?" Jerry demanded.

"To-morrow," said the brigadier, "or the day after, or next week. There is no hurry. The war goes on forever." With that he withdrew to a safer spot.

"And have you seen the cellar?" another demanded, his identity safely anonymous in the darkness. "Half full of water and stinks like a cesspool."

Lieutenant Butt felt unreasonably that the remark had been directed at him. He did not like the situation any better than his men did, and he had nothing to do with the making of it. Gladly would he have taken off his bars for the privilege of joining in the chorus of complaints, but an obscure

conception of what was due his rank prevented his saying that. There is satisfaction in being envied even if you are the most miserable being in the world.

"What's the matter with you men?" he asked sharply. "Here you get a nice two week's rest and still you kick."

"Where will you sleep, sir?" Sergeant Dale asked.

"In the truck," said the lieutenant promptly. "Bender, get my roll out of the car. It is, I may add, the most uncomfortable place."

"And the most dangerous," said a voice softly. There was a long silence.

"I think I will sleep in the cellar where I can keep my eye on you," Lieutenant Butt said after a time. He could have killed the man who laughed.

Only Hitchcock was elated this night. The men had gone muttering to the cellar and he stood alone in the street looking up at the broad plains above to which men toiled bent under packs, and on which the guns roared loudly. In his imagination they became reduced in size, neatly laid out in plots marked with white stakes and the beginnings of roads. That at any rate was what these desolate stretches would lead to. He saw himself competing in his chosen field: There was Mortimer and Snell; Ferris and Reed, and Robert Lester, Incorporated. All realtors of tried worth. But with the glitter of a cross to back him he could outsell them all. His

visions grew rosier. But why merely a cross? There were better decorations that the French gave. A *Médaille Militaire*. . . .

By dawn the ambulance section was up and ready for work. In the daylight half the dread and mystery that surrounded Le Port was gone. In an hour the place had grown familiar and being familiar it became commonplace. Readily adaptable, the men had accepted it. Complaints turned to the usual matters and diminished. Even the coffee was good for once and the smell of bacon was in the air. Judkins pointed with pride to the very dry wood he had found for his field kitchen. It prevented smoke. A roll of camouflage was there, they discovered, and a screen was rigged to hide the cars. The long white street through the town, chipped with powdered limestone and empty save where soldiers, one and two at a time, came down from the plain above and up from the river below, hugging the walls of houses lest an airplane be spying overhead, was hot in the morning sun.

The division which had been relieved was gone and the new division was quietly in its place, but not unobserved. In the German trenches signs were thrust up saying, "Welcome, men of Lille." "Welcome One Hundred and Sixty-second." And more brutal signs reading, "*Bienvenu aux Cocus de Lille*," which were designed to start rash attacks from the French who would understand that their wives in

the captured city had been violated. But the division was too old and hardened for that. The men contented themselves with shattering the signs by concentrated rifle fire.

Below, the Americans puffed their diminishing supply of cigarettes and studied maps. There were new *postes* to be learned: Fontenoy to the right, Roche to the left, straight ahead Nouvron, and others.

Thomas Bender had been remarkably quiet during the period of rest at Vivières. No officer had ever had a more devoted orderly; he was civil and obliging and intelligent. Moreover the paper work which occupied him during the major part of his time was handled with neatness and dispatch. The lieutenant's heart warmed to him and the sergeant's was already open. As for the men they began to accept him more as an equal than as an overgrown child. He had largely stopped the incessant, nervously boastful talk which in the past had irritated them and he appeared to have forgotten the youthful tricks which for a time had engaged him. Now bent pins no longer appeared in places where men were about to sit and blankets were not sewn together with thread which could be traced to the sewing kit provided by Bender's mother. Bender himself was the chief gainer by this abstinence. For a whole week nobody saw fit to box his ears, nor had he been kicked into or out of a room once.

"Babe must be sick," Cassidy had said. "Or else he's growing wings." He poked the youth violently beneath the shoulder-blades until he winced, but Bender said nothing.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't stir up the little pest," Horton had advised. Even then Bender said nothing, and his innocent eyes were undewed with tears. He offered his tormenters cigarettes, which they took.

Now with the section settled again at the front the reason for his exemplary conduct became apparent. He went to his lieutenant with a straightforward plea, after having asked permission through the proper military channels, a delicate attention which flattered Lieutenant Butt who was not used to such deference from his men.

"Loot," said Thomas Bender, "I've lugged your damn bed from one house to another ever since we landed without losing it, and I've just about bust a gut shining your boots so they won't look lousy beside the Frog officers. My paper work couldn't be better done if I spent all day on it, and if you don't believe me you can ask Dale, I mean Sergeant Dale, himself. I've even peeled spuds for that swine Judkins although I haven't been put on kitchen detail for a month, and yet I have time on my hands. Now I want to ask you a favor: Can I drive a car?"

"Thomas," answered the lieutenant gravely, "I

appreciate all you say. You haven't lost my bedding roll, but then I don't intend you shall. My boots have been well polished for exactly two weeks; it worried me a little, but I understand why now. As to that favor, you can not."

"Very good, sir," said Bender correctly and without the tantrum that his officer had expected. "Now I request that you approve of my transfer out of this section. I prefer the infantry, but if that's impossible I'll take the guns."

The lieutenant was puzzled and disturbed. There was no good reason why he should refuse a request for transfer, and yet he did not want to lose the boy. Toward that irrational, passionate spirit he felt a sense almost of parental responsibility.

"Son," he said kindly, "I don't see how you ever passed your mental test before we sailed. I don't mean you're cracked," he said hurriedly as the boy flushed, "but you are nervous as a cat and not well controlled. Wasn't there a car that you ran into a gate post at Allentown?"

"Sir, I was only sixteen then," Bender answered, "and a little drunk."

"And the incident when you threw an apple at that damn fool—ahem, the major? At Stroudsburg, wasn't it?"

"I hit him with an apple," Bender said more exactly. "What's that got to do with driving at the front?" He saw the look of irritation in his officer's

eyes and corrected himself hastily. "I've sobered down since then. The war's made a man of me."

He stood there, very young, very eager, his face aglow. His uniform, the lieutenant noted, had been put painfully in order for this interview. The spirals were rolled, incorrectly, and safety pins failed to conceal some rents. Usually Bender's appearance was a disgrace.

"After all he is a human being," Butt thought. "We're almost as likely to forget that as they are." He sighed. "A human being with hopes and ambitions and desires. Probably there's a girl somewhere he wants to impress."

Aloud he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. We're in for a quiet time, I think, at least for a few days, and I'd like to try you out now. I've put Hitchcock on the first driving shift because I want him to have a chance; I'm convinced he got a pretty raw deal at the school. I can't have more than one inexperienced man going out until we're established, so I can't use you both. But if you can persuade Hitchcock to change places with you then you can drive."

"He'll do it!" Bender cried, elated. "I'll make him. He owes me money for craps and if he won't change places he'll pay." He swung about in his eagerness to escape, then remembering his training he came back. "Thank you, sir," he cried, and snapped into a smart salute.

"If you bust an ambulance you'll pay," the lieutenant said warningly, and dismissed him.

There were no witnesses to the scene that took place between Bender and Hitchcock. They met in the empty shed behind headquarters, used at one time by some peaceful civilian for the storing of tools, but now converted into a warehouse where supplies for the cars had been piled. Here Holmberg as mechanic reigned, but Holmberg, finding himself again at the front and nearer than he had ever been at Hautefontaine, had been growing hourly more anxious. Now he was in the deepest and dampest part of the cellar with a sick headache. His sickness was beyond doubt; but it was his heart not his head that had betrayed him.

Bender found Hitchcock filling a *bidon* of oil for the car which he was to drive. Hitchcock was crooning a low song of triumph to himself and his face looked carefree, immeasurably less strained than at any time since he had returned from Meaux. Bender's eyes were shining with anxiety and there was passionate determination in his compressed lips.

"Hitchy," he said, "the loot wants to know if you'll change places with me so I can drive this first day out."

"Whaddya mean?" Hitchcock demanded, and his face darkened. "Butt told me this morning that I was to drive on the first shift. I'm getting oil now."

"But you can drive any time, Hitchy," Bender pleaded desperately. "I've got my chance and I can't miss it."

"Why can't you drive any time too?"

"Because he'll change his mind. He's so dumb he can't tell his ankle from his elbow two days running. He thinks I can't drive and he knows you can."

Hitchcock thought it all over. "Babe, I'd like to oblige you," he said, his voice conciliating, "but it can't be done. I missed a lot of time in that bloody school and there's a particular reason why I want to do some work at the front in a hurry."

"If you want to drive so bad what did you go to Meaux for?" Bender asked scornfully. "Because it was back of the front, if you ask me."

Hitchcock's fists clenched. "One more crack like that and you'll get a slap in the mouth," he warned.

"I don't care," Bender cried, and his eyes filled with tears. "Just because you guys are bigger than I am you think you can run me all around the lot, but you can't. Hitchy, won't you please give me a chance to drive? Just once?"

"Go ask somebody else," Hitchcock answered impatiently. "The way the others are always shooting off their faces you'd think they'd be glad to stay back in headquarters for a day."

"He says he can't have two inexperienced men

on post at once," Bender said desolately. "Please, Hitchy."

Hitchcock clamped the cover on his *bidon* of oil and turned to go. For a moment it occurred to him to yield to the younger boy, but his ambitious fate lured him on. One could never tell what would happen to-day or the next. Seize the opportunity within your grasp before it was gone forever.

"Nothing doing," he said.

Bender placed himself squarely before the door, barring Hitchcock's exit. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he suggested. "You owe me two hundred and twenty francs from craps. Let me drive in your place and we'll call it off."

Hitchcock hesitated. He had never had money and Bender had plenty. Then he put the idea from him. Within a few years what would two hundred and twenty francs mean anyhow? With his war record it would be nothing. But he had to get the record.

"Do you need it, Babe?" he asked.

"You know damn well I don't," Bender answered proudly. "My mother sends me plenty."

"Then let it ride till next pay-day. I'll fix up part of it then. But you can't take my place."

"I'll be paid now," the boy said sullenly. "You've owed it to me ever since St. Nazaire. I think it's a hell of a thing to play for money and then not pay."

Hitchcock turned red. "That was a slip of mine, Babe," he said steadily. "You know I have to make an allotment to my mother and every extra cent I can send her she gets. I haven't shot craps or touched a card since that night."

Thomas Bender was unmoved; his mouth had become willful. "All right then, let me drive and I'll call it off."

Slowly Hitchcock unstrapped the watch on his wrist. He held it for a moment, balancing it. Bender watched him silently. Then he drew some money from his pocket and counted it. Finally he held it all out.

"I paid a hundred and fifty francs for the watch in Paris and it's worth it. Here are thirty francs fifty centimes in change. I'll borrow the rest from Dale." Suddenly his voice was shaken with rage. "Take it, you damn little Jew!"

Bender snatched the money and the watch. Then he stepped to the glassless window which looked out over the Aisne. "Here's what I think of your money and you!" he cried on a high note. He flung his hand open and the coins and watch flashed downward glittering in the morning sun to the river below. The bills fluttered slowly, borne up by the light air. Then Bender turned, his cheeks stained with tears, and dashed from the shed.

Five minutes later there came a dull rending crash from the room in which the sergeant and the

company clerk had set up their office. The men in the courtyard looked at one another. "What'n hell's that? A bomb?"

Horton appeared from the house. "The Babe's off his conk again," he announced happily. "Hear that just now? The outfit's typewriter. Smack against the wall. There ain't enough left to make toothpicks of. I bet the loot will give him a court for this."

It was time for the five men to go on post. The camouflage had been rolled back and the cars, waiting for their drivers, stood ready drawn up near the street. There was a nervous adjustment of helmets and gas-masks. Maps were folded back at the proper place. Hitchcock appeared, buttoning his blouse. His face was very red and his eyes were hard.

"You've decided not to change with Bender?" the lieutenant, who had come out to see the first shift off, asked. "Perhaps it's just as well."

The first driver cranked his car and the second followed. The purring of motors rose. Hitchcock stepped in front of his car, bent and spun the crank. There was a puff of explosion as it back-fired and at once a sharp snap. Hitchcock stepped back as if bewildered; he tried to raise his right hand to his face as if to wipe the sweat that had suddenly beaded his mouth. Then grimly he stooped again and caught the crank in his left hand. But it would not spin. He leaned against the mudguard

and into his eyes came a look of horror and pain. His face which had been so red was now quite gray. He tried to raise his arm again, staring at it helplessly.

"What is it?" asked the lieutenant. "What have you done?"

"I think, sir," said Hitchcock, his voice breathless, "that I have broken my arm."

The other cars left of necessity since war never waits, their drivers staring back curiously. A new driver was detailed to replace the fourth man. Hitchcock had disappeared, helped by the sergeant. In the courtyard the remaining men whispered among themselves.

"Did he do it on purpose?"

"Hell, no, that car always bucks. Didn't he try to start it with his left hand? That shows guts."

"Grand-stand stuff. Didn't he get out of going to the front last time?"

"Just luck."

But still the whisper spread, subterranean, secret, hardly heard out loud: For all his brave talk Royal Hitchcock had deliberately broken his arm because he was afraid.

He appeared after a time, a white sling binding the arm close to his body. He was less pale, but his eyes were sick with bewilderment and shock. To those who came up, offering regrets with forced heartiness, he gave his left hand. "I'll be back,

gang," he asserted, his determined voice faint. "Don't let the war end yet a while."

Lieutenant Butt called for his orderly. No one had yet told him of the typewriter which had been broken beyond repair.

"There wasn't time to send you out to the front, Thomas," he said, "but I'm going to let you drive now. Take Hitchcock back to the base. It's at Canly; you can find the way." He wished them both well and hurried off to executive duties.

The ambulance driven at a mad speed lurched and careened along the poplar-lined road leading away from the front. Soldiers no longer walked furtively in little groups; they were casual, indifferent; then the area of destruction was passed. They were in the wheat again and women were working, their backs bent, hardly raising their eyes to the car that swept by. The towns were no longer empty; the *buvettes* were filled with loafing men and there were girls. The sound of the guns grew very faint.

Clutching the seat to save his arm from the swaying of the car Hitchcock stared from his little window with sad eyes. Bender, he knew, was driving the car at this reckless pace in order to inflict further punishment on his racked body, but he did not protest. When the greatest disaster had happened to his spirit it was useless to complain of mere physical pain.

He became aware that they had crossed a bridge and were in a town. Then the car was stopping before a great gray building where men in striped woolen pajamas hobbled beneath plane trees or sat in the sun. An orderly was helping him from the back of the car, lending a broad shoulder for his support. Thomas Bender came up.

"How do you feel now?" he inquired.

"Like hell," Hitchcock answered wearily. "The way you drove I think the broken bone is about sticking through the flesh. I didn't think you'd take it out on me like that."

Bender stared at him. "Why, that's the way I always drive!" he cried.

Slowly the three began mounting the steps and then they were in a long, cool hall. A French woman in a blue and white uniform was seated at a desk sorting yellow tags.

"See here, kid," Bender whispered breathlessly when they stood before her, "you'll need some coin. Take this; it's five hundred francs. And you'll want to tell time. These Frogs don't have clocks." He pulled at the silver chain which held his wrist watch and thrust it all into Hitchcock's hand. "So long, old-timer," he cried. "We'll see you soon again." Then he was gone and Hitchcock was alone in the long, gray room.

The battle broke out again with renewed fury. The initiative was definitely passing from the Ger-

mans' hands. But they fought. Clinging desperately to Soissons they rushed up reënforcements in an attempt to crush the encircling movements which would wrest it from their grip. They fought, but they were pushed back. Now the Americans understood the strategy which had placed their headquarters in Le Port under the plateau and almost in the trenches as it were. Those in command knew that presently there would still be trenches, but elsewhere. With true French economy they decided not to have the supporting ambulance section move twice.

Ground was ceded by the struggling foe who knew that to be thrown off these plains would be fatal, meters here, kilometers there; villages were being reclaimed—the outskirts of Fontenoy, and Tartiers. In a never-ceasing stream fresh men moved forward as the wounded came back. They, the wounded, were battered, torn and dazed, shattered by shell fire or drenched by gas, and among them were appearing men with bayonet wounds—clean dark holes, clean so long as the men were not left lying on the ground, otherwise corrupt with gangrene working deep into the vitals. For those who could walk signs sprang up along the roads marked with arrows pointing the way to the rear, for the ambulances could not carry all the wounded men.

The Americans no longer differentiated between types of wounds. If a man was hurt, he was hurt

and they took him to the nearest hospital; if that, being overcrowded, refused him, he was taken on to the next. There was no time for more. They had their own problems and losses, men were gassed or wounded, and Malcolm Sproul, a dark silent man, much older than his companions, was killed. He died as obscurely as he had lived. All one knew was that his body was found one morning on a lonely road within twenty feet of his wrecked car. Within a week the section had forgotten him.

Cars began to break down, they suffered direct hits and they had to be towed back to Le Port. In Holmburg horror grew. The mere sight of a blood-stained stretcher made his lips turn white and each succeeding trip after a disabled car was accomplished with increasing agony. The prophecy which Jerry had read in the cards hung over him always like the dark cloud of an inevitable doom. He knew that some time a swiftly rushing shell was going to blot him out, but humanly he sought to prevent it.

At times when he was needed he was not to be found and the other mechanic went out in his place, but always Holmburg appeared later with an admirable excuse. Twice or thrice when he approached an abandoned car a shell breaking in a distant field made him turn his own car with frantic speed and race back to headquarters where he reported, his face guileless and his heart sick, that

the area was being too violently shelled to be reached. Luck played with him and he was not caught, although once the suspicions of Sergeant Dale were aroused.

"It's curious, sir," he said to Lieutenant Butt. "Holmburg reported this morning that he couldn't get within two hundred yards of Henderson's car, and yet Cassidy towed it in an hour later. I'm inclined to think it's on the level and yet Cassidy said he didn't see a new shell hole anywhere near the place."

"How can you tell a new shell hole from an old?" the lieutenant demanded. "Don't worry, sergeant. If that great hulking brute couldn't get the car in no one could. Wasn't he a butcher or something at one time? Probably wishes he was in the infantry where there is real action."

Late in the afternoon of the twelfth day since the beginning of the attack Holmburg was returning from the motor park with a load of gas. His repair car was filled with the five-liter cans. He had looked forward to making this trip for some time, and he had prolonged it by every means in his power, knowing that at the *echelon* he would be safe. Deliberately he had stopped his car by the roadside for an hour, tinkering with the engine of it as an additional excuse, and while he adjusted and readjusted the carbureter, already functioning perfectly, shame and disgust welled up in his heart.

"You dirty coward," he said miserably, "you dirty, rotten louse. Get in the car and go on to your job. You're lettin' down your gang." But he could not. In the distance he could hear the guns and across the valley he could see where shells broke, mushrooming out into great clouds of white and dun-colored smoke. Holmburg would not look; he raced the engine loudly in an effort not to hear. He was a changed creature from the man who had so confidently come up to the front, changed even in the last two weeks. Now his eyes which had hollows beneath them held always an uneasy, wary look, a suggestion of cringing beneath the surface, and his mouth trembled weakly with self-pity or contempt.

The shadows lengthened among the trees and at last Holmburg knew that he must go. Slowly he replaced the hood of his car and climbed to the seat. But before this he drew the *croix de guerre* from his breast pocket and pinned it again on his blouse. The silver star on the gay ribbon glinted maliciously it seemed, in the sinking sun. Holmburg never wore his decoration when he was alone; when he was with those who knew him he did not dare to take it off. It had become in a sense the badge of his shame and a protection against it. Driving with extreme leisure he returned to Le Port.

Wary though his eyes were, there was not at first anything apparently different in the wrecked vil-

lage. It crouched above the river, its houses crumbling, its street empty. Holmburg drove to headquarters and stopped his car outside the gate. He called and no one answered; he called again but there was no reply; then suddenly the silence became ominous, fraught with sinister things. Holmburg remembered then that he had heard no sound since entering Le Port, nor had he seen a man. He leaned from his car and stared past the gate into the courtyard. An ambulance lay on its side and beside it gaped a hole which smelt of sulphur.

“What the hell?” said Holmburg. He had been in the town for perhaps thirty seconds.

What sounded like a freight of empty cars crossing a bridge clattered through the air and descended to the ground a block away. There was an intolerable, an incredible, roar and a column of smoke burst up such as Holmburg had seen on the distant fields. It rolled toward him, black and shot for an instant with flames. The man dropped the wheel and clutched his hands to his eyes. When he looked again the smoke was gone and the house where the shell had hit was gone too. It had sagged, a collapsing mass, tumbling its stones and brick across the road.

Another shell shrieked through the air and clattered down upon Le Port. Holmburg shrieked with it, but his cry was deadened in the following explosion. This one was behind him and nearer. He

flung his car into speed and shot straight ahead, crazed with fear, knowing nothing but the instinct to escape. Holmburg had forgotten, nor would he have cared, that he was driving his car of gas toward the front. He sped on, seeing only the shattered, half-blocked road before him. Behind him three more shells fell clamorously into Le Port.

A half mile further on the road, after a steep rise, came out upon the plain which stretched as far as the eye could see, dotted with villages for which the division had fought—Nouvron-Vingré, Tartiers, and nameless piles of stone which had been farms wrecked in the desperate battle. They were quiet now, but the roads that led to them were not quiet. On every crossroad, on every open space which might contain hurrying troops shells were breaking so that all the land was harrowed by the bursting shells and the air was filled with clouds of drifting smoke. Beneath the nearer explosions, but audible, was a distant sound, a humming, punctuated by the stuttering shots of machine guns. German airplanes soared through the pallid light of late afternoon and fired down upon the confused troops below.

Holmburg stopped his car. It was, he knew, impossible to go on. An inner compulsion held him static, his hands hanging nerveless on the wheel, his legs weak. He looked behind, but hopelessly, for over Le Port hung a column of black smoke where

something burned. A shell burst nearer to where he waited, and again the agony of fear drove him into action.

To the left of the road some twenty yards distant was a shallow wall, just a few stones which still stood one above the other a foot high. To this Holmburg drove, careening over the bumpy ground. He left his car and crouched behind the wall. When the roar of a shell came he pressed his hands before his eyes, his face crushed into the dirt; when an interval of silence followed he dug frantically, scratching a trench for himself until his nails were broken, the quicks oozing blood.

The sun had long since gone and a few stars shone palely down. In the cool twilight Holmburg shivered as if with an ague. A motor was passing and he dared to raise his head. It had stopped and Holmburg saw that it was one of the American ambulances, but filled such as he had seen no car filled before. Wounded men clung to the running boards; there were three on the driver's seat, another lay across the hood, face down, his body inert. The driver jumped from the car and hurried across the field to the broken wall. Holmburg saw that it was Jerry.

"You hurt?" he cried when he saw the prostrate man.

The mechanic looked up into Jerry's face. It was gray with dust and his eyes were reddened; his uni-

form was torn and there was a long scratch across one cheek.

"They've been shelling," Holmburg muttered and would have looked away again for shame.

"Well, they're not now," Jerry answered, his voice brittle with fatigue. "Get up; I want some gas. It's lucky you came out here. The Boche have jumped our front lines and pushed us back. It's slowed up for a minute and we're getting the wounded out. There'll be a rush of cars all night. The pontoon at Le Port is down and we've got to take the long road to Vic. Hurry, Oscar, I want some gas."

"Gas?" said Holmburg vaguely.

"Yes, gas," Jerry cried impatiently. "Your car is full of it. Didn't you come out here so we wouldn't have to double back to Le Port?"

"They were shelling Le Port," Holmburg cried. "I came here to get out of the way."

"I'll say they were shelling it," Jerry answered. "One or two ambulances got knocked out and then we scattered led by Butt himself. You'd think he was on a holiday. Since then we've been in those damn dugouts at Tartiers. Le Port's all right now, but they got the pontoon."

"If Le Port's all right then I'm goin' back," Holmburg announced suddenly. He half rose, but a shell sailed overhead and burst in a distant field. He flung himself back, his face covered.

"Are you sick?" Jerry asked, his voice incredulous.

"No, I'm afraid," Holmburg whispered. "I can't stay here."

Rage flared up in Jerry so that all his fatigue was burned away. Stooping he seized the big man by the collar and jerked so that it tore loose exposing his hairy throat.

"You'll stay all right," he cried. "You'll stay and you'll pass out gas as long as we need it. I've got nine wounded men packed in that car, you yellow bastard. Nine! Do you think I'm going to let them die by the roadside because you're afraid? I am not."

Holmburg rose, overtopping Jerry by a head. "I can't do it, kid," he said humbly. "I just can't."

"Oh, yes, you can," Jerry answered. "Who do you think you are? We've been up at Tartiers all day where there's something doing. I was buried up to my neck in dirt from an explosion for half an hour. How do you think I feel? You'll stay here all night and pass out gas or I'll report you to the loot and what's more I'll give you the damnedest kick in the ass you ever had. Now get going."

Slowly, his head bent, Holmburg went to his car and began to unload gas. He filled Jerry's car and watched it drive off with the impatient wounded without either man speaking. At intervals during the night the road on which the mechanic waited

was shelled and he ran to his wall trying to remember fragments of prayers from his childhood. But whenever an ambulance passed he was ready, handing out gas and doing such tinkering to the engines in the darkness as his expert fingers could manage.

He hardly spoke and the men, crushed under by the pressure of work, spoke only tersely to him. Holmburg imagined that they knew. All that night the cars swept by, springs creaking under the bodies of men whose faces were white blurs in the darkness. They turned at the crossroad and vanished in the direction of Vic, avoiding the wrecked bridge at Le Port. All night long they returned empty and blood-stained, the drivers staring ahead at the skyline where beneath descending rockets the guns spat and barked in an arc of yellow flame. Holmburg would have been glad to have walked on through the night until he came to that inferno, knowing there would be oblivion there, but he could not. Instead he watched the retreating ambulances with sad eyes and warily stayed close to his wall.

The sun rose hot and red at last through the smoke that drifted over the land, but the guns still thundered and it was noon before the attack died down. The Germans had been expelled again from the plateau. They were miserably lost in a thicket of woods beyond a deep valley, tormented by a

cross fire and thirst. Only their many dead scattered through the valley knew peace.

The Americans returned to Le Port. They were worn and gray and somehow older than before the attack began. Now while the lieutenant addressed them they stood listlessly in the courtyard of headquarters, with no thought of food, with little thought for the words being said, their minds and bodies intent only on sleep.

"When I first joined the army," the lieutenant said, "I met a captain who asked me, 'Why is an ambulance corps?' Incidentally he was in the Quartermaster's himself and I doubt not is passing out blankets this minute at Blois. If I ever meet that bird again—ahem, the captain, I think I can tell him why is an ambulance corps. I know and you know what damned good work you've done and I'm not going to praise you for it. It's something to fight a battle and it's something too to save the wounded from it. The *médecin chef* has promised me that General Maurier will award a certain number of crosses, but I want to make a recommendation of my own. I am going to recommend that Holmburg get the D.S.C. Just because we're with the French Army is no reason why we should be done out of every American cross, and in this case it's deserved. If I have any pull with Paris it will go through. While we were safe most of the time in

the cave at Tartiers Holmburg, acting on his own good common sense, established a gas station on an open road under shell fire and he stuck to it all night and half the morning as you know. I just wanted to tell you this unofficially so you would know how I feel. Sergeant Dale will tell you about the reliefs. Section dismissed."

There was subdued cheering, a little patter of applause, instantly checked, and the men hurried off to sleep.

Jerry came up to Holmburg. "I'm sorry for what I said last night," he began, trying to keep his voice from being stiff. "After all, you did stick it out. Naturally I'll keep my mouth shut, and as I said before I'm sorry."

"S'all right, kid," Holmburg said sadly. "S'all right."

Later he sought out his friend Judkins who was stirring a large kettle of boiling meat.

"Ha," said Judkins affably. "So you got another croy, Oscar. Soon you'll be havin' a vally to carry your tinware for you."

Holmburg looked at the fat face of the cook, bland and secretive. "You know about me, don't you, Jud; that I'm scared?" he asked huskily.

"Sure," said Judkins calmly. "Ain't we friends?"

He listened intently while the mechanic told him of the night. "I'm goin' to apply for somethin' else," Holmburg concluded. "There must be some

rotten, dirty work for me somewhere that'll be safe."

"Oh, don't worry about that guy, Tower," Judkins advised him. "Stick with the section; I may need you some day. What do you care what he says? They ask me why I'm in the kitchen when I can't even boil coffee an' all I do is make it worse next day. Cheer up, Oscar." He summed up his philosophy of life tersely: "Sticks an' stones may break your bones, but what the hell can words do?"

Two days later Lieutenant Butt sent for Jerry.

"I've an assignment for you," he announced. "You'll be pleased."

"Yes, sir," said Jerry. He imagined that it might be to drive to Villers-Cotterets or even Senlis for supplies although usually the second sergeant did that.

"The *divisionnaire* wants a car for a couple of days, and he's stationed at Eplessier."

The anticipation in Jerry's breast turned to dismay. To be detailed to the *médecin divisionnaire*, who was a white-bearded old doctor with the rank of general—an agreeable old gentleman whose knowledge of gunshot wounds was so slight as to be disastrous, but who had once won the Legion of Honor for attending the mistress of an ex-president —was a satisfactory job with no work and good food. But to be stationed at Eplessier would mean

that he would be near Hautefontaine. That would involve meeting Renée. His conscience was very tender about Renée; he had not written her, nor did he intend to. Since that night in Pierrefonds when he had run beside the train staring up into the face of the unknown girl he had determined to put Renée from his mind.

"I'd rather not go to Eplessier, sir," he said at last.

Lieutenant Butt frowned. "Why not?" he demanded.

Jerry grinned. "I'm getting sort of crazy about the front. Making that hairpin turn at Sablons Farm is as good as a shot of cognac."

But the lieutenant at this moment was not being informal. "I can't please you men," he snapped. "No, and I don't have to, either. You're going to Eplessier because the *médecin divisionnaire* asked for you. It seems you speak French." He turned away without answering the driver's salute.

"He's getting very hard-boiled," Jerry thought. "Well, perhaps it suits him better than his free-and-easy style. Now why did he insist on my going?" An explanation occurred to him. "Of course. He wants a decoration—they all do—and if he turned old Froment down when he asked for me there'd be no O.K. on that." Thus he classified the aspirations of all officers.

But to do him justice Lieutenant Butt was not

thinking of medals for himself. When Jerry was ready he came up to his car and spoke to him in a low, somewhat diffident voice. "By the way, Tower, if you want to exercise your French on some one beside General Froment you might give a message to a friend of mine. Her name is Monique Pinceloup and she lives beyond the *mairie*. Just tell her that Lieutenant Butt is all right and that some day he'll make her a little visit. Do it nicely now; she's quite a refined little person."

"Yes, sir," said Jerry and saluted.

"Why, you old lecher!" he thought as he drove away. "I'll mail that message from Berlin, not before."

Eplessier he found somehow different. His duties with the *médecin divisionnaire* settled—they were to be no more important than a tour of hospitals next day—he wandered about the town in a state of indecision. It was his intention to remain away from Hautefontaine, but nothing in Eplessier induced him to linger there. It was filled with new soldiers, men of a strange division who swaggered about as if they owned the place, and this filled Jerry with resentment. In a sense the Americans had made Eplessier their own; it was as nearly home as they might call any place in France. It was disturbing therefore to find it overrun by men who were welcomed in the cafés as eagerly as the former patrons had been. The exigencies of war and a de-

sire for profit led the French into facile friendships which were calculated. The old woman who had washed his clothes looked at him without recognition in her eyes; in the *Café de la Gare* he was overcharged for a beer.

"They like us for what they can get out of us," Jerry thought in sweeping condemnation of the whole race.

He found a seat on the church steps overlooking the graveyard. It suited his present mood. The exhilaration of battle was leaving him and his tense nerves were relaxing in resigned fatigue. The war—it would go on forever—an everlasting struggle not to be blotted out by the machine. He stared intently at the wreaths laid on the graves—wreaths made of wire strung with innumerable black, white and purple beads—*A Mon Père*; *A Ma Belle-Mère*; *Pax*: But it was Waynesboro that he saw with its elm-shaded streets.

The baize door of the church opened behind him and there was a step on the stone. Someone gasped and then his eyes were covered with soft hands.

"*Devinez!*" whispered a voice in his ear.

"I don't need to guess—it's Renée," Jerry answered.

Her dress, he noticed, was all black and there was a rosary in one hand. Her eyes which had been clouded at their last parting were shining now and

there was a delicious faint color in her cheeks. She came and sat beside him.

"We are rewarded for being good," she cried. "It is true, Jarrie. On Monday I met Madame L'Empreur who looked at me with reproach. 'Do you never pray for Jacques?' she asked. 'For my son who is dead?' I answered, 'Every night, Madame,' which is true since I pray for all our men, but she said, 'In the church?' and I had to say no. Although we would have been married I have not wanted to pray for Jacques ever since—" She hesitated. "For a long time," she amended. "But to-day in order to please a poor old woman all alone I came to pray, and I find you."

He smiled at her eagerness. "Is one always rewarded for being good?"

"Always," she affirmed positively. "The good God wills it so. Do you not believe that, Jarrie?"

"No," he answered slowly. "I don't believe anything now."

"They have hurt you again," she cried angrily and flung her hand in the direction of the lines. "Something cruel has happened like Vertefeuille so that you have lost your faith."

He was on the verge then of telling her of the girl who had appeared once and then again to him and who he now believed to be lost forever, for in the vastness of France, in the complicated machinery of the army, with him chained to a limited sec-

tor, he had given up all hope of finding her, but embarrassment compounded with fear deterred him. He could not say this to Renée.

"She might take it badly," he thought.

"But you have come to Eplessier again," Renée continued more happily when he did not answer. "I have found you here, Jarrie, but you would have found me later at Hautefontaine. Is it not so?"

"I am on detached duty with the *médecin divisionnaire*," he told her evasively. "Perhaps it would not be easy to find time to get to Hautefontaine."

"But I know him well," she cried. "Le Général Froment. He does nothing but sit in an office all day." Jerry said nothing. For an instant she was puzzled, then fear touched her heart. "It is because of my *dot*," she thought. "Now that he knows it is gone he no longer cares. Why should he? I am only *petite bourgeoisie*." She classed herself with the shopkeepers although the farmers were prouder than they.

It did not occur to her to blame Jerry for this imagined attitude; all the men she had ever known would have felt the same under the circumstances. To be sure there was Hautefontaine, but Hautefontaine at the front with a war that went on forever was no asset, not at any rate like the stolen five thousand francs in coins and notes. She looked at the American, her clear eyes wistful. He was dark and handsome and strange. Unlike the men who

had surrounded her one never knew what he would do or what he would say. Deep within him was the vitality of a new land; he himself was new, unexplored. She had found herself watching always for his quick smile, and his hands were very kind.

"I would be a good wife to him," she whispered to herself in a shadowy ecstasy. "Oh, blessed Virgin, help me find a way."

But in her eyes was no hint of what she thought and after a moment her lips were smiling too, curving sweetly at him and composed.

"You will at least come to Hautefontaine to see my grandmother," she said. "Often she speaks of you."

"If I can, Renée," he answered. "Yes, if I can." Her presence so close was disturbing; the faint perfume that drifted from her body toward him engaged his thoughts, but he did not wish her to take possession of his mind. The sun was sinking and it was growing dark. Violet shadows were cast upon the hills. If he could but wait here alone until it became really dark he might imagine himself again racing along the platform with the moving train.

"What do you do to-morrow morning?" Renée was asking, her voice a breath against his ear.

"A tour of inspection, as far as Verberie."

"Good," she answered. "I must come into the town in the afternoon—something for Madame

L'Empreur." Her voice was pitiful in the transparency of the lie. "Will you not meet me by three, Jarrie, at the *Café de Soleil*? If you are not there I can wait."

Jerry looked away, appalled at the yearning which was flaunted in her eyes. He would have been blind if he could not read how much she cared. "Oh, Lord, I didn't mean this to happen," he thought. "I've got to tell her the truth. I must." But he could not.

"I will be there, Renée," was all he said.

The night brought no answer to Renée's prayers. She had lain on her bed, staring up into the darkness, as if from the beams above might come miraculously the answer to the question that she asked, but the room remained black. No miracle of color and light such as had been revealed to her in the church during Jacques L'Empreur's wooing was vouchsafed. Dawn found her pallid, her eyes grown enormous with sleeplessness.

Hautefontaine sparkled under the morning sun. It was fresh again in spite of its great age, the walls and slate roof drenched with dew. A cool breeze danced through the valley and set the wheat to waving and the trees to nodding before its perfumed gust. The cabbages that the women had set out grew plumply in pale green rows; on an arbor near by grapes were swelling in the sun. The farm was beautiful with a quiet, sequestered beauty, but

Renée saw none of it. A feverish impatience tore at her. Once again the place where she had been born had become hateful to her. Her knowledge of life, she felt, was so limited. A country girl whose experience had led her only to Compiègne in one direction, to Senlis in another, but a country girl whose destiny was linked to a distant star.

She prepared coffee and milked the one cow that was left. Then she found an excuse that would take her to Eplessier. This was easier than it might have been for Madame Collette rarely spoke now. If she had heard what her granddaughter said she gave no sign of it. As usual she was sitting on her bench in the sun where she could stare for hours at the distant hills.

"Our poor Madame Moreau," sighed the doctor when he had last come. "A victim of the war." There was nothing else to be said.

Jerry had promised Renée that he would meet her at three at the *Café de Soleil* and it lacked hours of that, but in Eplessier she seemed nearer to him although she knew that he was far away at Canly, Verberie or Royalieu—any of the hospitals where General Froment, making his inspections, was squinting amiably if astigmatically at the nurses who stood meekly while he passed.

The girl idled with shopping and then walked slowly through the street, her eyes downcast while she thought. Somebody was passing her and she

looked up. It was Monique Pinceloup. Since the time when they had met on the common ground of their lost lovers they had hardly spoken. Renée had recoiled instinctively from the desperate and reckless Monique who, even in a town in the war zone where much was condoned, bore a reputation that could not be worse. But now Renée wanted to be kind; she was deeply in need of a little kindness for herself.

"Good morning, Monique," she said.

"Good morning," Monique answered and glanced suspiciously at her.

"A beautiful day," Renée continued. "I have left Hautefontaine for a time; my grandmother does quite well alone."

"So," said Monique noncommittally.

Renée sought for something else to say. "Do you hear from your friend, the American officer?" she asked at last. "He who was stationed here?"

The sallow skin of the other girl's face flushed a dark red and her black eyes became dangerous, bright with hate. She imagined she was being mocked. Why she who had given herself to a dozen other men in four years should have sprung up in her this infatuation for the angular Lieutenant Butt no one could say, and probably she herself did not know. But as the weeks passed in silence her heart grew heavy with pain for she understood that he had loved as lightly as she had loved before.

"But of course," she answered Renée's question. "Have I not told you the truth about us? When you have given yourself to a man he is yours forever. Even though he may seem to have forgotten for a time yet he will never forget. It was so with my little lieutenant, but now he writes each week. What is that to me? I have not even kept the insignia of his rank. It is I who have forgotten." She tossed her head.

Renée did not entirely believe this. She had heard before of girls who had trusted and been abandoned, but possibly Monique knew. After all she had much experience with men.

"Is it really true?" she asked wistfully. "If a man cared a little then later he would not forget."

"Quite true," Monique answered and laughed. "What else do men want us for? It will hold them for life. I turn here. I thank you for your company, Renée."

Renée hardly heard her go. At the thought that had come to her she flushed and paled, her hands clenched. Later in the house of a friend she stared long into a mirror. "Monique is sallow," she thought, "not fair like me; and yet she said that she could hold a man if—I couldn't," she gasped. "She lies. She lied at school."

Although she strove to put the thought born of Monique's suggestion from her she could not. It grew in her mind and grew until the vision of it

seemed to color all the fabric of her life. If that were really the way to win a man then Jerry would be hers forever. Certainly marriage seemed to hold the men she knew; divorce, legal separation, in the villages and farms about her home were practically unheard of, and this, the equivalent of marriage, no, the basis of it—she blushed—was what she planned.

She wrung her hands in indecision and she tried to pray; she imagined the words of scorn that would be flung at her—the fury of her grandmother, the contempt of Madame L'Empreur, other women in the town, but it was of no avail. Before her intent eyes was only the blessedness of a secret night with Jerry.

“Already I am a wanton in thought,” she whispered half in despair, “and between thought and deed what difference is there?” She knew the moral penalty, but that bore no weight. Her world was crashing to destruction about her, and it was as well that she be destroyed with it.

Turning again to the mirror she stared, as if already her face would be marred, but the same wide eyes looked from the pale oval countenance. Evidently wickedness might be concealed. Then she smiled as the decision was made, her face serene. “If I should fail to hold him,” she told her image gravely, “at least for that moment he would have been mine.”

They offered her wine, but she refused it. When she was alone again she tried to slap some color into her cheeks. Then before three she set out for the *Café de Soleil*.

They sat together in the *buvette* which at this time of day had no other patrons. Madame L'Empreur, behind her *caisse*, sighed heavily from time to time, thinking of her son who should have been sitting with this girl and of the rich acres at Haute-fontaine which went with her. But that was of the past; the war, ruiner of plans and crusher of dreams, had seen to that. She would have cursed the Germans, but the words sounded futile in her mouth; she would have wept, but her tears were for Jacques alone. Instead she moved patiently, slowly, on her gouty feet when they came in, to serve them, and sighed.

Renée and Jerry did not hear her sighs, nor did they drink the grenadine she had set before them. Elbows on the table, they stared into each other's eyes. They talked at first with an effort; their words casual, unconnected, with long breaks. Without realizing what it was each was conscious of something new in the other, a different attitude as if they were strangers.

"There are many wounded—at Royalieu," Renée said, her voice hardly inflected to the question.

Jerry was looking at her eyes. They were clear, pale and beautiful, but not so beautiful as other

eyes he had seen. For the fraction of an instant the Café de Soleil seemed to take on the form of the wooden house at St. Jean au Bois, then he brushed that from him and spoke as if coming awake.

"Royalieu? No, it was Canly that we inspected. I looked for a friend at Canly—a man with a broken arm, but he was gone—another hospital."

"A wounded friend at Canly," Renée said vaguely.

They raised the sweet syrup to their lips and replaced the glasses without drinking. Renée leaned toward him so that her breath fluttered against his cheek. Behind them Madame L'Empreur sighed.

"My grandmother has inquired for you," the girl said. "There is something that her poor brain wishes to tell you. She says you can be trusted. Will you come to Hautefontaine for the night?"

Something told him that what she said was not true. Whatever Madame Collette's interest had been in the past, this time she had not spoken. Jerry felt the dark color beat up into his face.

"I can not," he said slowly and reluctantly. "You understand I am on duty with the *divisionnaire*."

"But he sleeps all night. There can be no inspections. And to-morrow you go." Her words sounded clipped, broken at the thought of his leav-

ing. Looking again at her eyes he saw that some emotion had turned them dark.

"But my car would be missed," Jerry muttered.
"There would be a report."

"You sleep in your car, not with the men?" Renée asked and sought for some sign of yielding in his face. "Very well, you can leave your car as usual at General Froment's headquarters. We will walk to Hautefontaine. Then to-morrow—but to-morrow you can leave at dawn." She was imploring him, the fiction of her grandmother forgotten. "You will not always be in the Aisne. They will take you away, to Belgium or Alsace, and you will be gone. Life is so short and war is so long. I want you this night, Jarrie, at Hautefontaine."

She had said war was so long. It was true. Already to Jerry his months were years, to the French the years must be centuries. She had said that life was short, and she knew. To-morrow, next week, he too might be obscurely dead on some unnamed road, like Malcolm Sproul, or wounded, so wounded that girls like Renée would turn away with only pity in their hearts and the gifts they had to bring would be fruit or cigarettes, gifts that any one could buy. Before it was too late he wanted more—a memory to sustain him. She was lovely and soft and kind.

He closed his eyes in the agony of his desire. A train, it seemed, was rushing overhead; he stared

up at it from where he lay in the cinders and broken stones. Her face was leaning from a window of the train. Her face was frightened and it was white. She had called out, "No, no." Then the train was gone and her voice was gone with it. Renée had touched his hand.

Jerry opened his eyes and found her eyes wet with tears. She was alluring and she was sweet, and they were alone together in a falling world. He knew that he must dry her tears.

"For this night then," he whispered.

She was smiling at him now and there was courage in her smile. Monique's words, her own petty plan, the meanness of it, had gone from her mind.

"I will never forget," she told him.

Jerry took her hands in his; indifferent to Madame L'Empreur he kissed them. Desire was rising higher in him; his words were thick and there was a singing in his ears. The sunlight had vanished from his secret glade and before him there was only the night.

"We will never forget," he answered.

He put some money on the table and then with hands still clasped they left the *Café de Soleil* and took the long white road to *Hautefontaine*.

A strange division was coming along the road and along all the other roads about *Eplessier*. The men trudged on, company after company, their faces gray with dust as if they had come a great way,

their shoulders bent. They gave to the side of the road to let some camions pass and once an enclosed motor car swept through, an officer within whose cap was banded with crimson and faced with gold leaves bending over a map. The footsore men stared after him numbly, but there were some ironic cries.

“He goes to prepare a new hell for us!”

“*Non.* To find a safe *abri* for himself!”

They were marching again, dust and the clatter of equipment rising in the still air. Renée and Jerry stood beside the road under a tree watching the soldiers pass. At intervals they smiled at each other. They had seen soldiers before, but this was different. Here was a great blue serpent dragging its length past, and it was a show, a spectacle for their benefit. Like intent children they looked, and it was no longer their war.

“What division, *mon vieux?*” Jerry called out to a man.

“The Thirty-fourth, *quel mec!*” he answered and plodded on.

“They are very tired,” Renée said with pity.

“Yes,” Jerry answered in English. “The infantry, poor devils, are always tired.”

Suddenly the girl leaned against his arm, so heavily that he looked down. Her face had gone white like paper and her body shook.

“What is it?” he asked.

"The man who just passed," she answered, her voice hardly audible. "Did you see him?"

"The one I spoke to?"

"No, two behind him. Small eyes and red hair."

Jerry looked. The man had half turned to stare back at them.

"Who is he?" he asked, wondering why an undistinguished French soldier should so upset the girl.

"He worked for us," Renée said. "His name is Georges Denain; I told you of him. He is the spy."

Excitement swept over Jerry. Here was something new and strange. The age-old instinct of the pursuer rose in him and like the hound that sniffs a fresh scent he was after his prey.

"You are sure?" he demanded.

Renée nodded.

"Did he see you?"

"Yes," she cried. "He knew me, and I am afraid!"

The line had halted for a few minutes and the soldiers, breaking ranks, flung themselves by the roadside, resting on their packs, staring skyward. There was a scratching of *briquets* and smoke from the cigarettes floated in the air, there was a flutter of talk, words bandied all along the line, but for the most part the men were too weary for words. They lay there in silence.

Opposite Renée and Jerry stood a captain, dust-covered like his men, but somehow fresher. He

stood erect, disdaining to sit, and twirled a light cane or slapped it against his yellow boots. To him Renée told her story, diffident at first before an officer, but gaining confidence as she rehearsed her wrongs. The captain seemed unimpressed.

"But there are always rumors of spies," he remarked. "If you are really sure, Mademoiselle, you can make a report to headquarters. It will not be far, for to-night we rest at Cuise-la-Motte."

"Must I walk all the way to Cuise?" Renée asked.

"Ah, my little one, I would offer a carriage were that possible," said the captain gallantly. "Alas, there is no carriage for you, and such a pretty girl, too."

"In the meanwhile the man will never reach Cuise-la-Motte for he has recognized mademoiselle," Jerry exclaimed, indignant at the captain's playfully patronizing tone.

"You speak French," said the captain. "And find spies in the French Army!" Perceptibly he became more formal, colder to this affair in which they had involved him. "Your course has been indicated to you."

"He'll have me under arrest next," Jerry thought.

But Renée, sensing an affront to the American, argued with more spirit. They withdrew out of hearing of the men. A major joined them.

"Why not question the man?" he suggested.

"You take too much for granted, Noyer." The officer with the gay yellow boots and the little cane grew glumly silent. They walked along the line until they found the red-haired man sitting in the ditch, rolling a cigarette between work-roughened fingers. He looked at them incuriously.

"Speak to him," the major said quietly.

"Good day, Georges," Renée said and tried to hold her voice steady.

"Is it to me you speak?" he asked after a long interval during which his companions nudged him. They had risen together at the approach of the officers. "But my name is not Georges, Mademoiselle."

"Georges Denain. And your wife is Marie."

He blinked his stupid eyes and scratched his head beneath his blue cap. "I am not married, Mademoiselle," he said patiently.

"You were married during the five years you lived with us," Renée cried.

"I have never been in this country before," the man announced sullenly. He appealed to his officers. "What does she want with me?"

"Where does he come from?" the major asked one of the other men.

"From Greville, near Luxemburg," several cried at once. They were listening with intense interest.

The major raised his eyebrows. Men infected with a German spirit had come from the borders

of Luxemburg before. "But this division is of the Midi," was all he said.

"I am a replacement," the man answered. "I have never been to this place," he added defiantly.

"And yet you told us it was only six kilometers to Cuise-la-Motte," cried some one suddenly in a startled voice.

"There are maps," the accused man said less surely. There was a long silence.

"My five thousand francs," Renée began. "It is for that—"

"I did not take them, Mademoiselle," the man interrupted. Instantly he stopped, appalled by the implication of his words. The major's face had grown stern.

"It is enough," he announced. "She said nothing of money being taken although it was. We will have a further examination." He called a non-commissioned officer to him and a squad of men. Presently the ex-farmhand who had been found in a division from the Midi was marched away, deprived of his arms, guarded by his former companions. His head bent, his hands clasped behind him as if already tied for an execution, he plodded through the dust without looking back.

"He will be lodged in Eplessier," the major said. "It will be necessary for you to appear to-morrow at the headquarters for the cantonment, Mademoiselle." He obtained her name and address, then

whistles blew and the column was in motion again.

Jerry and Renée were approaching Hautefontaine. Neither had spoken for a long time, the boy looking straight ahead, the girl glancing sidewise at him.

"You do not talk," she said at last timidly. "Are you displeased, Jarrie?"

"What will they do with him?" he asked abruptly.

"Who? Georges? But they will shoot him," she answered with no animosity in her voice. The problem of Georges Denain no longer concerned her; she had her lover and she was content.

In spite of himself Jerry shivered. In his imagination it was all so clear. There would be a squad of soldiers and the red-headed man, dressed in nondescript trousers and a shirt open at the throat, would stand before them, his feet just balanced on the edge of the narrow *fosse* that had been dug. Before they bound his eyes he would look up once at the sunlight filtering through the trees, then presently there would be no more sun. It was inescapable, but from death there was no escape. He said as much to Renée.

"I don't like it," he concluded. "After all it takes a brave man and a devoted to serve his country that way. Would I be as devoted or as brave?" His youth, the vitality flowing within him, was in revolt at the thought of definite, decisive

extinction at a certain hour for a creature he had known.

"There is no escape from death," Renée answered.
"But can we escape either from life?"

This puzzled him and he thought that he had misunderstood. "Who wants to?" he said at last.
"At least he is brave."

"If you wish it I will appear before them to-morrow and say that I have made a mistake," she assured him. "Then they will let him go."

"Would you do that for me?"

"I would do anything for you," she told him steadily. "Even that."

"It will not be necessary," Jerry said. "He took his chance." But the thought persisted as if Georges Denain had already ceased to exist, "He was a devoted man."

They sat at supper side by side and opposite Madame Collette, eating little and saying less while the daylight faded and was gone. Save for a word of greeting and her rare smile the old woman did not speak at all.

"We will not talk of the war," Renée had warned him. "It always excites her now."

There were no guns to-night nor were there rockets from the distant hills. Heat lightning flickered on the horizon's edge, but the storm did not come. The countryside lay silent and dark as if there was no war.

Later when the meal was done they wandered down the lane toward the brook where they had sat in other days. Glancing back, they saw Madame Collette outlined against the pale sky, standing by her cabbages, crumbling in her hands the rich earth from which they sprang. Then at a bend in the road she was lost from view and they were alone.

Renée put her hands on his shoulders and Jerry kissed her slowly, thoughtfully. There was a dull pain in his heart as if a betrayal had been consummated, and illogically he thought of Georges, imagining it to be that. Then the tide of youth rose sharply in him and he kissed her again, his mouth warmer, more ardent.

"Let us return," his voice was breathless, "to Hautefontaine."

Madame Collette had disappeared; a single candle stood on the oaken dresser. Renée took it in her hand and at once her shadow wavered across the bare walls, enormous, hovering over him. Jerry followed her. At the end of the passage she opened the door into a room and set the candle down.

"You will sleep here," she said and without uttering the formal good night she was gone. When Jerry would have followed her the hall was empty and he could not hear her footsteps in the vast house.

He undressed and lay on the huge soft bed in the darkness. There were creaking noises in the old

house and, to his excited imagination, the sound of steps. Hours must have passed, but she did not come. He began reviewing the events of the day, then suddenly he slept.

When he awoke a light was flickering in his eyes. Renée in white was standing in the door. She was pale and her gray eyes, black now, held a hidden glow like dark stars. Her mouth was drooping and he knew she was afraid. Smiling, Jerry held out his arms to her. Slowly she walked toward them.

Out of the stillness and the night there came a prolonged, agonized whistle. It swept on, rising to a scream and burst with an astounding roar. There was a clatter of stones. With hands clutched tense they sat by the side of the bed, staring at each other. The incredible thing, made incredible by four years of immunity, had happened. Another rising whine tore through space.

Renée cried out. "They are shelling Haute-fontaine!"

Jerry dropped her hands. "Find madame!" he said. "We must get out."

From the barns came a tremendous clamor, the crescendo of falling stones diminishing to a dull roar. There was a frantic bellowing from the cow, suddenly stilled.

Jerry had run to the door. "Non, non!" Renée cried. "Les caves!"

Madame Collette had been brought from her

room, her thin body wrapped in a black coat. Jerry had pulled on his uniform; he carried his shoes in his hands. Stumbling against each other, supporting the old woman, they ran down the worn stone steps and into the dark stone cellars beneath. They were enormous, stretching away so that the flame from the single candle could not show the end of them. In the middle of the room stood a wooden bed covered with blankets damp with moisture.

"We brought it here when the war first came," Renée said. Madame Collette crouched on it and they sat beside her. When a shell came there was hardly more than a dull reverberation, but each time the concussion puffed the candle out. Each time Jerry relighted it with his *briquet*. It seemed intolerable that they should be left in darkness.

They counted as the explosions came, the women in French, "*Un, deux, trois, quatre.*" "One, two, three, four." A pause, then a new burst of shelling. It went on and on. A wall cracked and they stared at it with startled eyes without speaking for there was nothing to be said. Once Madame Collette seemed to go quite mad.

"My cabbages and my wheat!" she cried. "I must save them!" She struggled from the bed, but they held her back until her slender strength was exhausted.

"This is because of Georges," Renée said with utter conviction. "It is his revenge."

Jerry could not deny it because he did not know. The thought took hold of him and grew, that Georges Denain, condemned to death, would take them with him. But the *communiqués* would say, "Troops passing drew fire to surrounding farms." No one would ever understand. Above them Hautefontaine crumbled and fell.

Renée slept at last, her head against his shoulder. He held himself rigid although his body ached, so that she might sleep while he watched Madame Collette muttering of her cabbages and her wheat. So the night passed.

At daybreak, chilled by the dampness, they crept stiffly from the cellar and saw the desolation that the bombardment had wrought. The center of the house by some vagary of the shells remained untouched. There were indeed two rooms in which china still stood on the shelves and where the window panes even were unbroken. But the wings of the farmhouse had been badly hurt. Slate from the roof littered the ground; there were great cracks in the walls and one wall had crumbled. Beams, black with age, were upthrust from the débris of the fallen roof and a chimney hung at an angle toward the courtyard in which they stood.

The barns had been quite destroyed. There remained the shells of walls without roofs. A fire had burned fiercely in one of the lofts and the stones near by were blackened by it. A dark stream of

thickening blood flowed among the cobbles where the cow had died. There was the sharp odor of gas in the air. The fields thereabouts were filled with craters scooped out in the soft earth. Between them the pale green cabbages and the yellow wheat grew at intervals, but only at intervals. Hautefontaine as a place where one might live and thrive was gone.

Somehow between them Jerry and Renée brought Madame Collette to Eplessier. She stumbled along resting on their arms, her head drooping, and she did not speak. Once looking at her face, Jerry thought it was like that of a woman who had died.

A shell or so had fallen in the town; a house had been hit and in the cemetery graves were upturned. Certain of the more timid civilians were leaving, their household goods piled into carts.

The aide to the *médecin divisionnaire* met Jerry, a young man with an English education and a supercilious accent, who found himself pleasantly *embusqué* in this service. The general, he stated exactly, was furious. The town had been shelled badly and he had wished to leave; there was a car, but no driver for it.

“Two shells,” Jerry corrected him. After his own experience what had happened to Eplessier seemed unimportant, and he stood in no awe of General Froment. The French were always threatening to

report the Americans to their officers, but mostly they didn't.

"It was not the night to be chasing women," the aide continued while Jerry ground his teeth. Said like that it had the air of a vulgar intrigue. The American would at once take his car and depart, the Frenchman continued. Appropriate action as to his conduct would be taken after consideration. He stalked importantly away to other duties.

"Well, he used all the long words he knew," Jerry said.

"They will punish you," Renée said desolately.

"I'm not afraid of that bird or of anyone else who spends his time perfuming himself," he told her in English. "All goes well," he answered her uncomprehending look. "In reality we are dear friends!" He was annoyed with himself and somehow annoyed with Renée. She had stood so humbly to one side while the officer spoke, and beside that elegant fop from Paris she had become merely a country girl, uncouth and ill dressed. A peasant.

"You will come again?" she asked. "Jarrie, say you will come again."

He kissed her tired white face which was smudged with dirt. "I will, Renée," he promised her and watched the light grow in her eyes.

But as he drove away he knew that he would not again visit either Eplessier or Hautefontaine.

That romantic episode was done; he was glad now that it had ended as it had.

"You should have told her then," an inner voice accused him reproachfully. "She will always be looking down the long road, waiting for you to come."

"If I do not return she will soon forget," he assured himself uneasily. "There is some one else I have to find."

But he knew, unhappily, that she would not forget, that she would be scanning always the faces of the soldiers that passed along her road.

PART FOUR

THE ambulance section had moved from Le Port. Their cars battered, the men blind with sleeplessness, they drove out of the lines and with them went their division, what remained of it. They—the infantry and guns—were pitifully few and they were too tired to be proud. The villages and towns, the acres of waste land that had fallen before their arms left them unmoved. General Maurier had issued a printed announcement to each man beginning grandiloquently, "To those of us who have bought for our beloved soil," and recounting the land that had been won, but even this was not enough. Sagging, bent with fatigue, the men shambled from the trenches to whatever miserable rest area was to be theirs. Soissons, it was said, was tottering before the French advance, but those who saw through field glasses the twin towers of its cathedral knew that it was tottering indeed. There was likely to be little left of Soissons, and who wanted to capture a pile of stone? For the moment, as a fighting unit, the division was done.

A railroad station had been assigned to the Americans and they looked at it with distaste. The little house with its cornices faced with glazed brick stood beside the single track, uprooted in parts and overgrown with weeds, that strayed through the valley. Twenty yards from it ran a road. The station itself had been the target for guns, but save for the roof it was almost intact. In the embankment near it a shelter had been dug and roofed with elephant iron. Beds of chicken wire covered with moldy straw were in this *abri* and to a hollow in the floor water had drained, very stagnant water which stunk.

"Here's a fine place," said Lieutenant Butt with an assumption of cheerfulness that he did not feel. "More protection than we've had in a long time." He opened the door to the *abri*, thrust his head within, and gagged.

"We *need* a safe place," some one gave his opinion gloomily. "A road leading to the river and a railroad station! My God, don't they think the Boche have any guns?"

"I heard you, Carey," said the lieutenant. "What you want is a job in the S.O.S. and if you want it hard enough I'll get it for you. Think that over." They became silent at this threat.

"Do we take turns going in, sir?" a voice inquired mildly. The lieutenant looked suspicious, but the speaker's face was bland.

"It won't be necessary," the officer said. "Certain of you will be out to-night showing the new section their posts and the rest of you can stand a little squeezing. If you don't like it you can sleep outside. I'm not the man to prevent anybody following the dictates of his own conscience. Personally, I think that after the lines this place is pretty good."

"Where are your quarters, sir?" Thomas Bender asked. "I'd like to get rid of this bedding roll." He pointed to the mass of brown canvas and leather straps which it was his painful duty to conduct on a personal tour of France.

"Word hasn't come yet, Thomas. I suppose I'll be quartered at the field hospital at Jaulzy. The *médecin chef* is there."

"The French lieutenant left word that you would stay with your men, sir," Sergeant Dale said, his voice suddenly anxious. "There's no room at Jaulzy."

Lieutenant Butt's face was a map for conflicting emotions. It was incredulous and angry by turns; then the anger won and a wave of crimson swept to his forehead. He seemed about to speak, then he thought better of it and swallowed. Finally he took his top sergeant by the elbow and led him away from the men.

"This is the damnedest outrage I ever heard of!" he choked. "Did Palliser have the nerve to

say I could sleep in that dirty hole? By God, what do the French think we are? I'll have us all out of this dump by to-morrow if I lose my bars."

Sergeant Dale was the perfect non-commissioned officer. It was his function to interpret his officer favorably to his men, to do his own work properly and see that the men did theirs. He must be an executive, a martinet and a sympathetic adviser all in one, and he succeeded admirably although his hair was growing gray at the temples through trying. He had the most envied and most unenviable job in the section. That he was successful was due to his aloofness and his silence, for he rarely spoke. But now he indulged himself.

"Yes, sir," he said gently. "If the *abri* is unpleasant we can sleep outside. I think I shall—my rheumatism is not so good."

"Why, I didn't know you had rheumatism, sergeant," the lieutenant exclaimed in surprise.

Dale's brow was furrowed. "It's pretty bad," he admitted. "Doing paper work all day in damp cellars hasn't helped it much and I'm not twenty years old."

"I'm sorry," said Lieutenant Butt. "And I guess I'll just stick with you men until we get moved out of here. It wouldn't do to make a fuss with the *médecin chef*, now would it?"

"No, sir," answered Sergeant Dale. He was a born diplomat. To himself he said, "The old goat!"

The men are all in. If they think he's living on the fat of the land at Jaulzy I'll have a riot on my hands."

It was about noon when Jerry arrived at this railroad station. The men were lying about, sleeping where there was any shade or talking idly while they watched with dull eyes the traffic that passed upon the road. He drove his car to the few trees under whose inadequate shelter the other cars were parked and left it. Holmburg was there, repairing a radiator that leaked. He greeted Jerry dubiously for he could not forget the night on which the other man had discovered, not that he was afraid, but that he was a coward.

"How's tricks?" Jerry asked. "Say, is this where we're going to stay? I don't like it."

"It's great," Holmburg said with conviction. "The Boche would have to swim the river to get here, an' there's a nice little hole with elephant iron to crawl in." He was the only man in the section to approve.

"That may be," Jerry answered. "Say, Oscar, look at my carbureter. The damn thing's on the blink."

Obediently the mechanic came over and began to test it. He was encouraged by Jerry's amiable manner; possibly this man too would preserve from the outfit the secret which tormented him. "Listen, kid," he said shyly. "You remember what you told

me about bein' bumped off—back there in Vivières? Well, it ain't happened yet."

"Don't worry," said Jerry casually. "It will." It meant nothing to him; the whole affair had been a matter of such utter unimportance that for a moment he did not know what Holmburg meant.

Holmburg had finished with the carbureter. "It was just flooded," he explained. "Oh, well, we gotta die some time an' it can happen only once." His voice was rather faint for him and resigned.

Judkins came from his field kitchen which had been set up in the station and joined them. As usual the odor of grease preceded and followed him and his denims were badly stained. His fat, pale face was good humored, but his eyes were watchful. If Tower was riding his friend Oscar he meant to take a hand. So he phrased it to himself.

"Jese, you should 'a' been here this last three days," he announced. "I never seen so many wounded. Pretty soft for you back in Eplessier."

"That's your idea," Jerry retorted. "I was in Hautefontaine last night and they shelled it until there wasn't much left."

Judkin's eyes brightened with interest. "An' the *divisionaire* in Eplessier! Chasin' that Renée girl again. You want to look out, kid; women'll get you yet."

"You're safe with that mush of yours," Jerry grinned.

"That's all right," Judkins answered placidly. "I had a girl named Norah once, but you ain't refined enough to hear about her. Oscar's goin' to get his American cross," he said suddenly. "That's official. The loot said so."

Jerry glanced at the *Croix de Guerre* hanging on Holmburg's left breast. "One cross breeds another," he observed. "They're worse than rabbits, boy, I'm telling you."

"Never believe it," Judkins said earnestly. "Oscar here's a brave man, an' he deserves what he gets. We're all liable to be a little scary under fire, but Oscar's all right."

"Sure, all cooks and mechanics are brave," Jerry answered. "You'll be a brave man if you dare serve rotten food to-night." He wandered away to another group.

"Don't worry about him," Judkins advised Holmburg. "He knows me. If he talks I'll spit in his soup."

The afternoon wore on to the accompaniment of distant guns. Ambulances creaked back and forth with their loads; a battery of seventy-fives drawn by their sweating teams woke momentary interest in the men.

"The Boche must be going back if the guns are going up," they said. Once again they returned to their sleep or their insufficient washing with brackish water drawn from a ruined well.

At five o'clock Judkins appeared from his field kitchen, hot with sweat. "French fries to-night," he announced ingratiatingly. "Who wants to help peel spuds?"

Wearily they cursed him into silence. "Get the hell outta here, cookee, we're not working now." Nevertheless two men rose and followed him to the kitchen.

"A cook's work ain't never done," Judkins grumbled. "'Stay up till midnight an' give hot coffee to the last men off post,' the loot says. What's he think he's runnin'—a baby hospital?"

They ate at last and then gorged to repletion they lay back comfortably, enjoying cigarettes. Good news came in. A runner passing told them that the new division in a determined daylight attack had cleaned out the ravine beyond Tartiers. The Americans cheered; they could afford to; they had not been there. Then the lieutenant appeared to announce that Jaulzy had informed him this spot was to be their home for one night only. Late Sunday they would move; he did not know where, but with the manner of a cadaverous Santa Claus he implied that they would like it. With simple faith some of his men believed him.

"At least it couldn't be worse," others argued. There was the usual refrain—"Liquor and made-moiselles." Almost they began to enjoy the war.

But at the exact moment that the sun dipped

behind the hills the Germans tossed two shells of small caliber on the road leading past the railroad station. They exploded with sharp, vicious cracks. The road was empty and no damage was done, but the men looked at one another uneasily. Some of the more hardy or more squeamish who had decided to sleep in their cars got up quietly and returned with armsful of blankets. That dugout with its roof of elephant iron had become an asset.

One by one they came into it and composed themselves for rest. The lieutenant was among the last. He found his bed in the corner where Bender had put it and lay down.

"Cut out the smoking," he ordered them. "You can keep the candle lighted, but the air's too foul for smoke."

Conscious of the nearness of their officer the men whispered among themselves with suppressed laughter. Their faces, young and eager, receded in the shadows cast by the candle. Outside it grew darker and stars flickered in the ripples of the Aisne. The night traffic had begun again along the road; it droned heavily, steadily on its way to the front. At intervals a Frenchman cursed, guttural, incoherent. Once a mule brayed.

The door to the *abri* opened and Jerry came in. As he swung-to the rough boards coated with iron there rose a wild, strange melody on the air.

"Who is that howling?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Nobody's howling, sir," Jerry told him. "It's Judkins singing while he works."

"I'd go out an' keep him comp'ny," Holmburg thought. "But they'll shell the road again an' I'm afraid. Oh, Lord, I can't stand this. I'd better tell the world an' have it over."

"I'm afraid," he said harshly to the man next to him. But the man did not answer. Like many others he was asleep.

Stupefied by the bad air and numb with fatigue the men were not at first conscious of the significance of the airplane overhead. At its intermittent hum they stirred drowsily, half waking, then drifted again into sleep. Only Thomas Bender said in his clear, high voice, "That's Boche!"

The plane swept beyond the station and the hollowed embankment; it described a half circle and swooped back, flying low. On the road all traffic had stopped. Horses, mules, guns and men became immobile, poised as it were on the brink of nothing. A cigarette was crushed in a clenched hand. Even the sound of breathing died. It waited, the traffic on that crowded road, while the airplane wheeled above.

There was a bright flash, so bright that it penetrated the chinks in the dugout door. The crash that followed shook earth down on the sleeping

men. It rent the night into a thousand whistling, screaming particles of steel. No one was sleeping now. On the road a horse reared in its harness with a snort that was choked in blood; it swerved sideways and fell, dragging over the caisson that it hauled. The silence which followed was so intense that watches in the dugout could be heard ticking; save for that and the slithering of men's bodies who had thrown themselves from their wagons to the long grass there was no sound. In the kitchen where coffee boiled for the last shift out it was very still.

Another bomb fell, to the right of the spot where the last one dropped. The men cowered as it burst. "He's tryin' to spot us," one muttered in anguish. "Oh, my God!"

The high, unearthly screaming that followed chilled their blood as if a violin string had been twanged too long. It rose and floated away on the breeze, it drifted back again and filled the dugout until the thick air quivered with the vibrations of it. Intolerable, unwavering on the same key, without pause for breath it tore their nerves.

"Listen!" cried the lieutenant. But no one had spoken. Looking from one face to another in the candle-light the men saw that they were pallid, open mouthed, their skin beaded with sweat.

"It's Judkins!" Holmburg cried suddenly. He struggled to his feet.

"Where are you going?" Lieutenant Butt's voice

was officious, sharp with rage. "Don't touch that door!"

"It's Jud," Holmburg cried again. "He's hurt! Who'll bring him in?" There was no reply. Fear for himself seized the mechanic and terror for his friend. It had come at last, his call—he knew it now. Presently he would thrust open the door and run out toward the voice that was screaming on and on. There would be a flash and the singing of metal that tore at human flesh. His hand was on the door.

"Who'll get Jud?" He was sobbing, the other hand outstretched toward the men. Intent, as if they sat at a drama, they watched him silently.

"Keep back!" cried the officer. "They'll get us all."

"Out!" said Holmburg. He thrust aside the quiet, hard-muscled figure of Sergeant Dale who had slipped toward him and flung open the door.

There was a blinding glare and a rush of heavy wind. The lieutenant stumbled back and sat, not on his bed but in the water that seeped along the floor. Dale slammed the door closed. "He's dead!" he cried, his voice shaken. The candle was out; without speaking they crouched lower in the darkness, listening to the humming of the plane.

It was not dark outside. A Very light hung low, burning with an intense white fire. Beside the railroad track the mechanic found the cook. Evi-

dently he had run from his roofless house toward the *abri* after the first bomb. He was moving still when Holmburg reached him, dragging himself along the ties by his hands. The high, wild screaming had faded to a whistling in his throat. Holmburg knelt beside him.

"Where'd they get you, Jud?" he cried. "Where you hurt?" But it was needless to ask. One of the cook's legs was gone, the other hung by a fragment of flesh from his thigh. There was warm blood on the tracks and blood on his greasy denims. Holmburg ripped off his belt and the cook's belt. In the failing glow of the Very light he tried to improvise tourniquets. There was blood on his hands now, his body was being drenched with it; there was the taste of blood, bitter, against his lips. The odor of it was choking him, but Holmburg did not care. Two more bombs fell and the air was hot with singing metal, but Holmburg was conscious only of thankfulness for the red glare.

The belts had been adjusted at last and he rose with the cook in his arms. Then moving carefully he walked toward an ambulance, his face turned defiantly to the sky.

The Vicomte de la Eyte had lived fifty-two of his fifty-six years at Jaulzy, his father had spent a lifetime there, and his father before him, but the vicomte would never have recognized it now. In

the formal gardens with their yew, the clipped box and the quadrangle of rose bushes, wooden barracks had been built. In the pond where swans had sailed, elderly soldiers now scrubbed the blood-stained uniforms of their comrades. The sedges had been trampled in the mud and the miniature pleasure boat with its vermillion-painted prow was gone.

The American ambulance turned in at the drive and drew up before the door of the long, winged house, built in a slavish imitation of Versailles. Holmburg jumped from the seat of his car. Beyond the unkempt lawns was the forest which had once sheltered boar and deer and pheasants, the game preserve which the Vicomte de la Eyte kept to amuse his friends. But the game was gone; the coverts were bare. Holmburg did not know nor would he have cared that this had been one of the most famous hunting grounds in northern France. The coverts were only trees to him, and until tonight he had been unable to endure the sight of blood. He looked at his huge hands; they were red with it.

Without waiting for stretcher men he took Judkins in his arms, mounted the shallow steps and carried him into a long hall. Mirrors, tarnished and cracked, lined the sides of it so that he saw himself reflected a thousand times, each time carrying his friend. He cradled the lax figure more gently and

his heart grew sick. Judkins did not look as he ought to look.

At the end of the hall was a salon filled with beds. Night lights burned on tables and orderlies shuffled about in felt slippers. They exclaimed with indignation when an ambulance driver, invading their ward, laid a freshly wounded man on a bed. Some of the patients awoke and raised themselves on elbows to watch. The walls of this room were covered with pink satin and it had been the Vicomte de la Eyte's pride. Here he had held his more formal evenings, but the crystal chandeliers that had lighted them were gone and the satin was in strips; fever charts had been pinned to it. To Holmburg it was just a room.

"I want a doctor," he said.

One came and then another, contained and quiet in white coats. They busied themselves with instruments and bandages, and they took Judkin's pulse. Then they shrugged and stood away.

"Do somethin' for him," Holmburg ordered harshly. "Damn it, you gotta fix him up." They could not understand him and he could not understand them, but finally they made him realize that there was nothing to be done. The mechanic sat gingerly by the bed and waited. Once he asked for water. It was brought to him and carefully he washed his face.

"I wouldn't want to look too fierce when he

wakes up," he told nobody in particular. Intently he watched the fluttering eyelids and whenever he thought they were about to open he smiled.

Toward morning the cook did wake up. He stared straight up into Holmburg's face fixed in an anguished grin above him, and he smiled too. He wanted to speak and Holmburg bent closer.

"You can't kill Judkins," the cook said, or maybe it was, "You can't kill Germans." Holmburg couldn't tell for the words had only fluttered on his lips. Then he died.

The men were just stirring when the mechanic returned to the railroad station. Those who had gone out had returned to report the tragedy that had happened on the tracks. That it was tragedy was obvious. They were shaken by their night and by their own escape, but their admiration for Holmburg had risen almost to awe.

"You'll be slated for the *Médaille Militaire*," one said. "Watch Butt get it—he always gets what he wants."

But the lieutenant took another view of the matter.

"We know you're brave," he said to the mechanic in the presence of them all. "You've proved that twice, but you're also foolhardy. There was absolutely no sense in risking the lives of the entire outfit for a man who was done, and especially when I ordered you not to. The old grapevine is still work-

ing and I hear the men think I'm going to recommend you for a citation. I'm going to do nothing of the sort. I'd recommend you for a court-martial if we didn't need a mechanic in the section more. In future let us take your courage for granted and obey orders. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Holmburg indifferently.

He turned to the listening men and made a strange speech. "The loot's not pinning any more medals on me, guys," he said. "That's all right. I won this cross last night." He touched the decoration on his breast. "But what the hell do I care?" His voice grew heavy. "Jud's dead."

They thought he was incoherent because of his friend's death and their sympathy grew, but with a curious feeling as if he had been witnessing a death-bed confession Jerry understood. He was the only man now living who could possibly understand.

It was Sunday morning and some soldiers were at mass. They knelt in a smooth green meadow, their faces turned toward the rough altar which had been erected in the center. Before each man his helmet lay and every blue-clad shoulder was bent, drooping in humility and obedience. The sun was hot and bright, warming their backs and touching in glittering points the arms that they had laid aside. Along the road which ran past the meadow traffic

ebbed from the front in clouds of dust, but the men did not hear the wagons and the guns that passed; they listened to the chaplain in cassock and stole drawn over his uniform who prayed.

Royal Hitchcock was trudging along the road, making his way back again to the headquarters of his outfit. The arm which had been broken swung easily by his side to the rhythm of his walk and he held himself erect. But it was very hot. The men in the green meadow drew his attention and he walked over to them. They looked relaxed and he too wanted to rest. Since early morning when he had been released from the hospital he had ridden twenty kilometers and had walked ten. He had only a vague idea where the section was and it occurred to him that among these men he might find some attached to his own division who would tell him where to go.

For all his confident demeanor and the hard, bright quality of his gaze Hitchcock was sick at heart. He had had weeks for reflection in the hospital at Canly while he lounged under the plane trees or walked about the grounds, and his reflections had been bitter. More than that they had been despairing. He had slept little at first because of the pain of his broken arm, and later he had not cared to sleep. Instead he lay awake, rehearsing the incidents in the chain of evil luck which had hounded him. Resolutely, because he had always

been resolute, he tried to discover wherein he had personally failed. There must be a reason for the humiliations and the trials that had overcome him, but never in the quiet of the ward had he been able to find an answer. And so his bitterness grew. Other men less efficient, without confidence, had succeeded where he had succumbed. He grew depressed, almost afraid, for how could one fight an enemy that could not be recognized?

"I'll get back to the outfit and something else will happen right off the bat," he thought. "I know it will. Not a broken arm, but something that I don't expect." He shivered, knowing what his friends would say. "They think I'm yellow, by God! Me that only wants one chance. Just one chance now is all I ask." He was appalled by the enormity of his failure.

But he had squared his shoulders and hardened his eyes, facing the world with an assumption of courage that he did not feel. "Throwing a bluff," he called it. You could always get by somehow if you threw a bluff.

He was among the kneeling men, and a boy with a finely drawn, gentle smile made room for him. "You'd think he was in heaven," Hitchcock thought, looking away embarrassed from the rapt expression of his eyes. He stared along the lines seeking on a collar numerals that he might recognize, but finding none. His brown coat was con-

spicuous in that field of blue, but no one had turned toward him except the boy who had given him the tender, comprehending smile. A dragonfly, iridescent in the sun, darted above them with futile, quickly-checked swoops. Hitchcock watched it.

"It's like me," he thought. "On its way but not getting anywhere."

Then he became conscious of the priest, his mellow, bell-like voice. He had turned toward the men.

"Saint, saint, saint est le Seigneur, le Dieu des Armées! Tout l'univers est rempli de sa gloire . . ."

Hitchcock did not understand all the words, but he knew that the priest was calling on the Lord, the God of Armies. It seemed appropriate here within earshot of the guns to pray to a God who had the soldiers in His care. Not that Hitchcock took much stock in that. His attention wandered to the men. What were they here for? What did they want? They were praying, intent like children on the priest, and he wondered drowsily in the hot sun why they prayed. For victory? For peace? Safety perhaps. No one seemed to wish for battles but himself. Were he a praying man he knew what he would pray for. Advancement—a career. That was it of course—at bottom what all men wanted.

An incident had occurred in the celebration of the mass. The men were bending forward intent, their eyes following every movement of the priest.

One near Hitchcock was weeping, the tears coursing down his grizzled face. "He couldn't want to get on in the world," the American thought. "Not at his age. He's too old." He looked again. None of them had the faces of men who prayed to be successful lawyers, shop-keepers or—realtors.

A cloud floated across the face of the sun and for an instant the earth was dim. In that instant something happened in the heart of Hitchcock. He had been unhappy, bitter; he had been struggling with despair. Now he was calm and peaceful, almost content.

"Why, I know what it is!" he exclaimed to himself in a sort of wonder. "They're praying for help—not for any one thing, but just for help to meet what comes. They can't go on alone; they aren't strong enough. Who is? I've been dumber than a jug-head to think that I could manage this man's war for myself. Why, a shell could squash me as easy as I could squash that dragonfly up there, or it could pass me by. And what difference would it make, anyway?"

His conception of the war was changing while he knelt. Phrases that to him had been empty, words that had been banal, patriotic clichés drifted through his mind with new meaning.

"How thick I've been," he thought. "How damn thick! These birds are fighting for something big

—bigger than they guess, perhaps, but I've been fighting for myself, alone."

He dropped his face in his hands while the sweet-ness of resignation flowed into him. Nothing mattered now, nothing had ever mattered. His failure at the school, his broken arm, veiled taunts of the men were washed away in a great wave of tranquillity. The voice of the priest sang on to the benediction. Hitchcock continued to kneel in prayer. What he said was, "You can't buck God."

It was afternoon when he reached the camp by the railroad and already the men were beginning to pack for the next move. They greeted Hitchcock soberly, without enthusiasm, their minds still brooding over the events of the night.

"They don't like me," Hitchcock thought. "I'll have to begin all over again." But his new-found peace did not desert him. He listened intently while they told him of Judkins' death, and he was able to offer his sincere admiration to Holmburg for his courage. The mechanic, sitting apart, nodded, his face sad.

"I could do it again," he muttered.

"I'm sure of that," Hitchcock answered, and tried to quell the criticism rising in his mind at the mechanic's words. He had been saying odd things all day, but Jerry, who had overheard, again understood.

"He'll never be afraid again," he told himself,

and something like envy for Holmburg rose within him, although he had hardly known fear himself.

"If you'd got back a day sooner Jud would've been alive now," Cassidy said to Hitchcock, and Hitchcock's face flushed at the implication that when he was present war ceased. It would be easier for him, he thought, to say nothing, but he could not. So he turned to them, his shoulders squared, his eyes steady.

"Listen, gang," he began in his assured, aggressive voice. "This morning when I was coming along the road there were a lot of soldiers at a field mass, and I went, too." He paused and took a deep breath. "Something happened to me," he asserted, "I don't know whether you'd say I got converted, but down in here"—he touched his heart—"it was as if something opened and I knew then that you were right and I was wrong."

They were watching him intently, or staring away toward the river with elaborate unconcern, conscious that such intimate confessions of faith were neither customary nor practical.

"You may think it funny that I didn't get hep to myself before," Hitchcock continued, "but it's taken me all this time to know what the war was about. I thought it was a chance for me, Royal Hitchcock, to go up in the world; I thought it was started for my benefit alone. No wonder I wasn't called to do anything at the front; I wasn't fit.

When I didn't want to do anything for my country I couldn't; now that I really want to—now when it isn't for myself—perhaps I can."

There was a long silence. "You think it will break the hoodoo that's been after you, Hitchy?" someone asked respectfully. It all sounded rather like magic to them.

Hitchcock smiled. "It won't make any difference if it doesn't, but I have faith it will. With help," he added.

"You going to quit cursing, too?" another asked.

"Shut up!" said Jerry sharply. "Can't you see he means it?"

Sergeant Dale was calling them to the cars. They drove away from the railroad station, glad to go. There was something sinister about those tracks where Judkins had met his death; there was something strange about Hitchcock's return, preaching the faith that was in him. Other men had attended mass, but they forgot it promptly. Their cars were going away from the lines, away from the guns and death. In another place it would be peaceful and they could sleep, for a while. There was to be a new cook from Paris and, always hungry, they speculated about the cook. The cars were going further away from Eplessier and Hautefontaine. Already they had passed Jaulzy and the subdued activity about its door. Stretchers were going in. Poor Judkins! Only Holmburg looked that way.

Isolated in the quiet of an abandoned farm the section took little interest in the military activities of the next few days. They had, they felt, earned their rest. There were no newspapers and they were too close to the war to have a perspective on it. The man who was killed in a trench raid was as finally dead as if he had fallen in a great offensive; the wounded did not estimate their wounds by the importance of an attack. Nevertheless rumors were heard of a great battle, and names began to appear which had hitherto been unknown save on staff maps: St. Pierre-l'Aigle, Missy-au-Bois, Berzy-le-Sec. Vierzy, with its great quarried cave and railroad, had fallen. Suddenly the woods were full of gaunt Americans drifting back, grim and starving; platoons where there had been companies, companies that had been battalions, they returned silent in their triumph.

An ambulance driver reported that Pierrefonds was filled with wounded; their stretchers lying row on row reached full across the square. The violent rains, the thunderstorms of the past few days were gone and a pitiless sun beat down on them. Other drivers in the walled farm saw units of a Scotch division swinging past, their kilts flaring above hairy knees, and a new name figured in the talk. Buzancy. The kilties had reached Buzancy and many would never go beyond. But within a matter of days a *communiqué* baldly stated that the evacu-

ation of Soissons had begun. A great sigh lifted in the breasts of the armies.

Two men returned from leave and Lieutenant Butt was in a quandary. He sent for Hitchcock. "It's your turn for a week's *permission*—yours and Tower's," he said, "but I feel a little bit dubious about offering it to you. I understand that you want to see some action and it is hard luck that you have been deprived of it through no fault of your own. We have been out of the lines nearly a week now and I don't know when we'll go in again. Here's the rub:

"It may be that if you go off you'll get back in time for the next fight; personally I doubt it, things are moving too fast. If I send someone else in your place either he misses his rest here, which nobody wants to do, or else we'll go to the front again and then I'll be accused of playing favorites and all the rest of it. Having had slightly more experience with shells than you everybody wants to go on leave when a battle is in order. Of course I'm not playing favorites, but I want to satisfy you all. Consistently I've tried not to be the hard-boiled officer although it's not so easy."

Hitchcock gave his rare smile of resignation. "It's decent of you to take all that trouble, sir, and I appreciate it. It's quite true that I want to take my turn at the advance posts more than anything in the world, but for different reasons now. But I've

learned my lesson. You can't force the hand of God and everything happens in God's good time. I have faith that it will with me. That's all, sir, except that I will take my leave now that it has come my turn." His eyes were very clear and his voice had deepened slightly with patience and the yearning for perfection.

"Very well," said the lieutenant, "get ready." He turned away.

"Good Lord, once I almost made him a corporal," he thought. "One thing this outfit doesn't need is a praying corporal."

The train which took them from the railhead sped south through lush fields and towns untouched by war. It was a relief to see these towns so tranquil and the people unconcerned save with the affairs of their everyday life. At certain stations women in uniform gave the men on the troop train chocolate and dried cakes, and children in black smocks offered shyly nosegays of flowers. Jerry's heart beat faster when the women approached; it might be that among them he would find his girl from the woods, but they were always French.

Paris lay grimy under a pall of smoke and with the warning of an American provost guard in their ears, who had looked with suspicion at their French travel orders, they hurried across the city to the Gare de Lyons. The train, filled with soldiers of all ranks and civilians of all classes, backed and heaved

forward in its long shed. It was packed to suffocation; even the vestibules were piled with baggage, and the wailing of babies arose. To the accompaniment of whistles it crept forth at last and gathered speed along the shining rails. South, always south. Jerry and Hitchcock said little, each busy with his own thoughts. What Hitchcock was thinking Jerry did not know. Possibly some inner consolation for his disappointments upheld him, and as for himself he was pondering the facts of Judkins' death. Save for the physical shock of his passing that left him unmoved. They had never been friends. It was with Holmburg that he was concerned.

"He went out there with bombs bursting around as bright as day," he thought. "He went out when he was afraid. No one else went out, only Oscar." For a long time he considered this, remembering his contempt for the mechanic, the scornful words he had flung at him. "I told him I'd kick his pants," he muttered in embarrassment. "Me!"

Then he remembered that the lieutenant had ordered them to stay inside. "We all knew that Judkins was done," he thought. "The loot knew it. That screaming—" Holmburg, he realized nevertheless, was a brave man—very brave. "I'd have done as much in a better cause," Jerry told himself. "I have done as much."

Suddenly a voice spoke softly in his ear. "You should have told her." He turned blankly to Hitch-

cock who was squatting beside him in a corner of the corridor. "Did you speak?" he demanded. But Hitchcock was asleep.

He knew now that the voice had come from within, and his thoughts swept back to the ruined farm of Hautefontaine, to Renée. They were reluctant, broken. "A decent girl . . . too decent for me, but I made love to her. . . . There was someone else who spoiled it all, and I should have told her . . . I said she would forget, but I knew she never would . . . Too good for me . . . You'd think she was a whore, and I left her half promising . . . because I was afraid." The inevitable conclusion came to him so sharply that he blushed with self-contempt:

"The only reason I didn't tell the outfit about Holmburg was that I was ashamed for him. I'd have ruined him with the gang forever except that what he did made *me* ashamed. He was afraid all right, but when the time came he stood up. When my time came I lay down. Holmburg's a brave man, but I'm a coward."

Furtively he raised his hand and unloosened his collar to ease the wave of scarlet beating in his throat. He looked about as if the entire car had understood, but people merely grunted, moving uncomfortably in their seats.

About midnight Hitchcock woke. "It's hot," he said, his voice thick.

"It's not hot," said Jerry, "it's cold as hell. I don't think we're going south."

Hitchcock gave a profound sigh. "I guess you're right," he murmured, "I never am."

Later he moved restlessly in his corner, easing his back against the baggage that supported them. "I'm stiff," he said querulously, "and I ache from sitting here."

Jerry agreed with him. He looked at the seats filled with middle-aged civilian men and pallid young clerks from the Government offices. "It is absolutely *émerdant* that soldiers just from the front should have to crouch like this," he announced in a clear voice, but no one moved. Those nearest gazed away from the soldier who presumed to ask their seats.

Impossible delays at junctions, intolerable delays while frantic station agents tried to clear the tracks. There were hours spent in Marseilles. The civilians hurried into the town, but guards kept the soldiers on the train. There was no food and no wine. At last the train slipped away again through its second night. Hitchcock was sleeping noisily, his head on Jerry's shoulder.

They reached Nice at dawn. Americans, cursing bitterly at work which required them to rise before the sun, were at the station. Each soldier as he stepped from the train had his leave orders examined and was directed to a hotel. Cab drivers in

the street vociferated patronage. Hitchcock and Jerry decided to walk.

The town lay quiet in the grayness, its latticed windows still drawn. Here a grocer was opening his shop, arranging in their bins potatoes and wilted beets. A woman slipped into an alley, walking furtively. They came out on a broad, long avenue and before them was the sea. It heaved and ebbed against the white shore in gentle surges. Along the avenue stretched houses—hotels, white among the dark palms that guarded them. The sun rose out of the sea and all the white houses turned pink; the water became a vivid blue, shot with green. The grayness burned away. A window opened. Nice was alive.

They found their hotel, rococo, overornamented now in the too bright light. In their room they sought the mirror.

"I need a shave," Jerry said, disgusted. "Lord, what a trip."

Hitchcock had seated himself in a chair. "Open a window, will you?" he requested. "It's hot."

"It's not hot, really," said Jerry. "And they are open." He looked at Hitchcock. "You look like a boiled lobster, Royal. Do you feel sick?"

"I am sick," Hitchcock announced. "Sick that I have to spend a week here. But after that I can go back and do my part. Before I wasn't fit."

"You're always so sure," Jerry said.

"Because I have faith." Hitchcock stood up and sat down suddenly. "I'm hot," he complained.

Jerry touched his face. "I think we'll take you to the hospital and let them look you over," he decided. "That trip was too much."

In the lobby Hitchcock swayed against a soldier. "Who the hell are you bumping?" the man demanded.

"Sorry, buddy," Hitchcock answered. "It's my mistake." He reeled again.

"Steady, old-timer," Jerry whispered and caught his arm. "We'll take a cab."

A victoria stood outside the door and with a flourish the driver cracked his long whip. Hitchcock was very gay during the ride; his spirits had risen and the cool breeze fanned his face. They passed a group of girls in the uniform of the Y.M.C.A.

"They're good-lookers," Hitchcock cried, and waved his hand, until, smiling, they waved back.

In the hospital there was nobody before them. "Blue pills for both?" asked the young doctor amiably. Then he looked sharply at Hitchcock, drew out a thermometer and thrust it in his mouth. A minute later he was shouting for orderlies.

"Get this man on a stretcher," he ordered, "and into bed."

Hitchcock was waving farewell. "So long, kid," he cried. "Come around to-morrow."

"Be good, Royal," Jerry answered. He turned to the doctor. "Is he very sick, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Hell, no," said the doctor with heavy sarcasm. "He's only got a temperature of one hundred and four, and the flu!"

Nice was filled with men. There was dancing in the Casino which jutted into the sea; expeditions were being organized for trips—to St. Agnes, to Grasse and villages on the coast, but Jerry found himself out of humor with it all. A search of the places converted to purposes of amusement convinced him that the girl he looked for was not there. Depression settled on him for in his heart had been the hope that if he found her at all it would be at Nice.

"I'm out of luck," he thought dispiritedly. "To come three thousand miles to find her and then to lose her forever. What's this damn war about?"

Hitchcock, he decided, was after all the fortunate one. If he had to be sick again it was better to be sick on leave. If it had happened in the section the chorus of ironic criticism would have been intolerable.

"He can lie in a white bed," said Jerry, "without making a pretense of having a good time. His soul is sick, and mine is too." Until now he had never been particularly sorry for Hitchcock.

There was no escaping the gay music. It came from the Casino and from a hotel; on a street corner a ragged Italian was scraping a violin. Only the soft thunder of the surf could drown it out and he spent the afternoon on the beach, staring at the sea.

Obediently next morning he presented himself at the hospital, with a bag of oranges. "Hitchy might like them," he thought. "They look sort of good. After all we *are* on leave."

The young doctor was not there, but a private of the Medical Corps sat behind his desk. He was reading *The Stars and Stripes* and did not raise his eyes.

"You're too late for sick call," he remarked. "Come around at noon."

"Listen," said Jerry. "I'm not too late for anything. Snap out of that paper and tell me if I can see a man named Hitchcock. He's a friend of mine."

The private took up a ledger, opened it at a certain page and ran his eye down the list. "Naw, he ain't here," he said and closed the ledger decisively.

"Certainly he's here," Jerry retorted. "I brought him in yesterday myself."

"Well, he's been discharged then. Did he owe you money? How long do you think we keep 'em? This ain't a hotel."

"You little squirt! For a two-franc piece I'd

smash your face. Now find out where my friend is." Jerry was smiling, but his voice had grown very hard.

The private opened his book again. "Look for yourself," he complained. "There's no Hitchcock here."

"He couldn't have walked out," Jerry persisted in bewilderment. "Why, yesterday he had a temperature of one hundred and four."

"One hundred and four?" The private's voice had subtly changed. He turned quickly to another page. "Listen, buddy," his voice was gentle. "I got bad news for you. Your pal passed out at three-thirty this morning. First name Royal? Well, he's dead."

The room was swimming before Jerry's eyes. A minute before the beggar with the violin had been playing on the street; from a house a doughboy crashed chords on a piano. Then all the music stopped.

The private of the Medical Corps looked at the ambulance driver pityingly. He glanced at the unfamiliar insignia on his shoulder—a white Cock of France against a maroon ground. "Take a seat," he suggested. "I guess you ain't seen much war."

Later Jerry returned to the hospital and found the young doctor there. "But it happens like that," the latter explained. "Very quick. And with that temperature in an adult!" He shrugged. "Twenty

minutes after you had gone he was trying to sit up in bed, proclaiming that he was fit. Delirium, you know."

Jerry moistened his lips. "Did—did he say anything, sir? When he died?"

The doctor had not been on duty and he did not know. They might, he suggested, ask the nurse.

"It makes no difference," Jerry answered. "That couldn't help him now."

Nice had become a great white mausoleum filled only with shadows—men animate and with the appearance of flesh who in days or weeks would be dead. He wandered the streets, trying to find some semblance of reality in it, but he could not. The obsession was constantly with him that Hitchcock had failed. All that youth, confidence and aggression; the indomitable spirit fired by a high purpose—"For it was a high purpose," Jerry insisted, "at the end"—had gone to dust. The world was mad. It reeled through space without direction or order, and there was only chaos.

A woman stopped him on the Promenade des Anglais. "You look lonely, soldier," she said. "Come over to the Casino and meet some nice girls."

Jerry looked blankly at her in the bright sun. "No," he said strangely. "All the music's stopped."

Alone in the room which he should have shared with Hitchcock a measure of peace came to him. In the eyes of the world Royal had failed. In that

life cut off there was tragedy. But had he failed? Dimly it began to come to him that Hitchcock, who had not been able to make one gesture for his cause, had at least achieved an assurance that all was well with him.

"Because he was happy," Jerry thought. "Ever since he rejoined the section his mind has been at ease. He had faith and because he had faith he knew. He might have failed before the world, but he triumphed in himself."

There was, he suspected, nothing that could have been added to the final measure of Royal Hitchcock. He had been changed, reborn, and after his mystical experience he was complete. In one gorgeous moment he had learned everything which the rest of the world takes a lifetime to know. It was no longer necessary for him to go on.

So Jerry believed, but his leave had turned bitter to him. He could not stay. That night, ignoring the five days still at his command, he left Nice.

Four days later he appeared in Eplessier. These days had been spent oddly, and in defiance of all regulations, wandering in areas where he had no business to be. He went to Chalons-sur-Marne on the rumor that many American girls were there, but the girl he sought was not. Escaping ignominiously from the provost guards he appeared in St. Dizier on a futile quest. Routed back in a troop train

he deserted it at Vitry-le-Francois at the glimpse of a girl with copper-colored hair. But it was a strange woman, startled by his happy cry. Paris was closed to him.

At last in a degree of sanity he turned toward the front. "Why, I'm like Royal," he thought. "Struggling on as if by my own efforts I could do anything."

He approached the front, but he approached it by way of Eplessier. A dual purpose moved him. He could not, he thought, meet Holmburg until his conscience was as peaceful as the mechanic's own, and he must definitely, decisively, cut the last tie that bound him to Renée. Something of the humility that was Hitchcock's had entered into him. He thought, "I hope I can be gentle." She would, he knew, be waiting, as she had always waited—for the escape that should take her from the farm, for Jacques who had not returned, for himself whom she expected.

"There are too many women waiting in France," he thought. "And they have waited too long."

They sat on their doorsteps in the cool of evenings, looking out across valleys, waiting for the victory and for peace; for the return of those they loved. Their eyes were patient and their lips were still. They had been, Jerry was convinced, misunderstood. In the small towns.

An army on the march, an army from overseas had no scruples. It had viewed the women eagerly, too eagerly, and believed them light. "We're dirty, and we're grimy and mostly we smell," he thought. "If they give themselves to us it's for pity—a debt they think they have to pay—but we're not even grateful." Somberly he came to the town.

He entered Eplessier through the dusk. It was worn and gray, incredibly bare and old. The shops were empty and the *buvettes* were bare. Glancing into houses, only simple furniture could be seen and little of that—some pots and pans, one treasured possession, a feather bed or chair. It was old and there were old women lingering in a group about the church. Bent men, men not fit for war, shuffled slowly in felt slippers. Slowly, quietly, they had sifted back, occupying precariously the houses which were theirs under suffrance, eyeing still with dull surprise the alien signs proclaiming, "Bureau of Information," "Major of the Cantonment," or "One Officer, Eight Men." Coming along the road Jerry had noticed the uncut wheat.

Renée was sitting before a house, her hands folded in her lap. When the American was a long way off she saw him and rose suddenly, coming toward him with a light, quick step. She had met him, and her hands were clasped in his.

"I knew you would come," she cried. "I knew

you could." Then she drew him down a side street. "Where we are alone," she whispered. "Here all Eplessier stares."

They were behind the houses where, between the steaming piles of manure, vegetables grew scantily in the untended soil. A low stone wall cut off the houses from the fields and from the woods that fringed on them. Jerry lifted Renée to this wall while she rested her hands on his shoulders, her pale face with its warm seductive lips bent toward his face. He sat beside her.

"I have a story to tell you, Renée," he began painfully. "It is a long story and I may not tell it well in French."

"I have always understood you, Jarrie," she answered. "Have I not understood?" She was laughing at him, mocking him gently for she knew he spoke French well.

But he remained grave. "I should have told you long ago. Because we are such friends I think you would want to know."

"*Bien?*" There was a sharp note of interrogation in her voice.

"I was in a wood," he said. "At sunset. And I was lost. There was a *coöperative*, for soldiers, you understand. At first it was dark in the *copé* and the wood; then it grew bright in the setting sun. There were other people about—soldiers—but I did not notice them. There was a girl."

The figure beside him grew tense.

His words were less halting as he talked, and his voice grew warmer, colored with desire, and pity at the futility of his quest. "I did not know it was like that. A dozen words—I think there were no more. I did not know it could happen like that. But later at Pierrefonds I knew. The room, the *estaminet*, was filled with light, like the setting sun. I was drunk, the men who were with me would have said so, and I went out."

He had forgotten her as he talked. She touched his hand once, but it was cold, inert. In the dimness she could see that he was looking beyond her, unseeing, at the wood. Before him was the station and behind him the château was silver in the moon. White faces were looking at him from the windows of the train, faces white like the bandages about them. He had raised his hands high above his head, clasping them in congratulation and farewell. Then the train was slipping past and she was there.

"I fell down at last," he said, "and she was gone. When I got up again my face was bloody, but I did not know that it was cut."

There was a sound beside him; Renée had begun to cry. He became aware of her at last. Pity touched him and shame, but he could not stop. "I looked for her at Verberie and Canly and Royalieu. I thought she might be at Nice."

"You will not find her," Renée said. "My poor

friend; without even a name to ask for. She has vanished if she ever lived."

"I had a friend," Jerry answered, "who died at Nice. This last week. He wanted always to do something in the war; he tried harder than any man I know, and yet he never did. But he had faith that some time, how he did not know, it would be well with him." He became silent for a long time. "His faith is in me," he concluded abruptly. "I know now that somehow, some time, if I have to search the world, I will find her."

Renée was smiling at him through her tears. "It was not such a long story to tell or so difficult," she observed.

"I wanted you to know," he answered. "You are a dear friend, Renée."

It had grown very dark so that he could not read her face. In the dimness it was only a white glow, infinitely still. Blacker clouds had rolled up over the horizon, drifting down the sky. It was so dark now that even the white glow of her face was lost.

"There'll be no air-raids," Jerry said in English. "No moon to-night."

Renée's voice beside him was a gasp: "No, no moon to-night."

After a time she said as if it were of no consequence, her voice aimless, "Jacques L'Empreur who wanted to marry me is dead. Those who are dead can not trouble us, Jarrie." The young Frenchman,

she thought, might have risen between them; the American might be remembering her old love.

There was a long silence, then Jerry spoke as if he had not heard: "I shall not return to Hautefontaine."

A cool breeze came from the forest, lifting the hair on their foreheads, touching them with chill fingers. Renée shivered and together they walked back to the town.

He discovered that Renée and Madame Collette were living in a room that they had rented. The farm was no longer habitable; indeed the Germans still shelled it at intervals.

"What became of Georges?" Jerry asked. "The man you thought was a spy."

"I do not know," Renée answered. "I testified and then they took him away." She spoke with an effort.

"I should like to know the end to his story," Jerry said regretfully.

"There are no ends to stories in the war," she replied. "They go on and on, and we go on and on."

"Death is an end for some."

She muttered in soldier slang, "*Ils ont la veine.* They are in luck."

They had come to the house where she lived. "It is small," Renée said. "Only one room, not big like Hautefontaine and so I can not ask you to stay." At the memory of that other night her face became

distorted for an instant, then at once she was quite calm.

"I shall sleep in the barracks near the Place Bucot," Jerry said, embarrassed. "Because I am with the French Army I will find a bed."

"But you must remain in Eplessier at least to-morrow. My grandmother will want to see you. You are tired and it would be well to stay." The wild hope came to her that if he could be induced to remain for so little as one day a miracle might happen, that the prayers she would say and the candles she would light would be answered, and he would be hers again.

"I can not," he answered hastily. "My leave has expired. I should be with my section to-night."

As if she had recognized defeat for her in his voice, she did not ask again. Standing together in the empty street their hands touched.

"Will you kiss me?" he asked wistfully. "To wish me good-bye and luck?"

Palpably she hesitated, then her arms were about his neck. He could feel the lashes of her closed eyes against his cheek, his face, unshaven, pressed against the softness of her face.

"Jarrie," she whispered. "Little soldier, wherever you are, forever, I wish you luck."

His arms were empty and he was alone in the street. Slowly he turned toward the barracks off the Place Bucot.

He had planned to leave early next morning, for as he had said he was already overdue in his return to the section. He had spent too much time wandering about France; that had delayed him and camions traveling in his direction to the front were hard to find. It would be unwise to linger.

But before even he had been served with the dry bread and coffee provided by the cook for breakfast Madame Collette appeared. She walked stiffly, very bent and thin in her black dress, leaning upon a cane. The Frenchmen saluted her with respect; there was that in her sunken eyes which told them she had lived her war. But it was to Jerry that she addressed herself.

"Would it be possible, Monsieur, to speak to you?" she asked courteously and indicated a spot a little way off from the listening men.

His burned skin was slightly pale as he walked beside her. French customs were so infinite and so odd that he was bewildered as to what he might expect. Possibly Renée had told her tale, but at once with indignation he rejected that. Madame Collette Moreau was talking:

"I saw you when you first came to Hautefontaine, Monsieur. I watched you when you lived on the farm. I said to Renée, my granddaughter, there is a man whom one might trust."

"I hope so, Madame," Jerry answered gravely. Glancing at her he realized that to an extent she

was demented. There was a fine, tight smile about her lips and her eyes were too steady, too intense.

"I have a favor to ask you, Monsieur. A favor I can ask only of one I trust." Her strange smile which had included everything was now for him alone. It made him feel ill.

"You know Maison Rouge, the great stone on the hill that marks the cave beneath?" He inclined his head. "There is in that cave, Monsieur, a box that I must have. It is so large"—she illustrated with her hands—"and banded with iron. Will you get it for me?"

It was perfect nonsense, Jerry thought. Probably there was no box at all, and in any case without a car he would have to walk to Hautefontaine, from there he would have to walk again over fields to the pink rock on the hill. Once the German lines had run near there. It would make him late, terribly late in getting back to the outfit. He explained all this to Madame Collette.

"I am sure, Madame, that any of the soldiers stationed in Eplessier would be glad to get it for you."

"But I could not ask them," she answered; "they are French. No one must get it but a stranger who has no desire to settle in the Aisne. Otherwise I would be robbed again." Her eyes were trying to smile at him now—terrible in their desperate eagerness.

"Your own people would rob you, Madame!"

Her whisper was so low that he had to bend his head to hear: "They are the papers to my farm."

"Does Renée know?" But she did not answer, her eyes blank again with their intent smile.

Jerry thought for a moment. He was late now, and there was probably no truth in it. He did not know the meaning of these papers or why they should have been hidden in a quarry on the Aisne. Vaguely he connected it with some story of Madame Collette in the early days of the war—something which had happened at Hautefontaine. But for Renée's sake he decided to go; it might be that there was an atom of sense back of the mad woman's fantasy.

"Very well," he told her. "I will get the box." He had to recall to her twice, specifically, her request before she explained where the box would be.

After he had left Hautefontaine the way grew very rough. It ascended unevenly through fields abandoned and overgrown. It descended again into swamps where Jerry stumbled knee-deep in muck. On every side were craters where shells had plowed into the soft earth. The top soil had been stripped away and beneath were ridges of a chalky substance, leprous-white, like bones. An old line of trenches was here, disused and filling up, the approaches to it barred by rusted wire hanging on its stakes.

The sun rose higher and the day was hot. Jerry found a log and sat down. His spirals were torn and his face was drenched with sweat. Beyond the log was a grave, very rough, which had sunk almost to the level of the ground. But the tipping head-board was still there and Jerry looked at it. The name of the man buried beneath was gone and there was only a fragment of inscription left—Regiment 141. Jerry sat there thinking of this man: He was young, probably, and he had worn blue—for a time. One day he had gone out to climb this hill, and he had run forward and stopped, and run forward again, the pulses beating in his throat. He had known emotions—exaltation or fear—there was so little choice, and then something had happened and he had run no more. All his youth and the passion that had moved him, all his future years, were done. Now he was forgotten and there remained as an epitaph of his endeavor a weathered board with the fading letters, Regiment 141. A profound depression for the futility and the waste settled on the American.

“What’s this war about?” he asked of the empty fields.

Doggedly he climbed on again toward the Maison Rouge. It bore, he found when standing beneath it, no longer any resemblance to a pink house. The great stone which glowed from far off was near by merely discolored and covered with lichens. From

the quarry beneath where limestone had been dug a breath of damp air puffed in his face. Reluctantly he entered.

There were evidences of occupation here—a rusted roll of wire, a discarded helmet. Jerry touched it and found that it was French. The war narrowed again in perspective. Evidently the attack had been successful and the unknown soldier who had never seen the end of it had not died in vain. He felt relief. At the very end of the narrow passage to the left, buried behind a pile of stones, he found the box, quite as Madame Collette had described it to him. The wood was rotting and the lock had fallen apart. In the sunlight again he forced open the lid.

Papers were there, slimy to the touch, and so mildewed that nothing could be read on them. But there were seals and stamps, official markings all but gone. Deeds. The legal proof of land obtained through the years piecemeal, an acre here, an acre there.

"No one could read this stuff," Jerry thought indignantly. "It's useless. All that trip for this!"

Trying to hurry, he returned to Eplessier, but it was late afternoon before he arrived. He had not eaten since morning and he felt faint. Madame Collette admitted him to the house where she lived. Silently he handed her the box. With hands that trembled she opened it while he watched her face. She looked at the pulpy papers and she touched

them. Jerry expected her to cry out, to exclaim in dismay, but she did not. Suddenly she smiled, a tremulous, wrinkled radiance.

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" she whispered. "*Merci.*"

"She doesn't know they're useless," he thought astounded. "She's so crazy that she doesn't know."

Once more he took the road out of Eplessier toward the front. It was late and he was tired, but he pressed on. An uneasy conviction possessed him now that he should not have paused. In the shadow of the church tower a woman was waiting; Jerry could see the flutter of her skirt, but he did not look up. She was bending over the gravestones when he came abreast of her, but when he had passed Renée looked after him until his figure dwindled under the poplars and was gone. Then she returned to the town. Another night was before her, and it would be dark.

The division was on the move again and the ambulance section was moving with it. Scanning the road anxiously, Lieutenant Butt cursed the regulation that sent men on leave. He had had no leave, no, none since landing in France, nor did he see any possibility of obtaining one. Instead he was reasonably sure of remaining at the front, tied to executive duties until the war ended, if it ever did end. Under the unwilling ministrations of

Thomas Bender his treasured bars shone as brightly as ever, but in effect they were tarnished.

Orders had come for the cars to take the road at a certain hour; to delay would be impossible for the traffic was so great that a block system was being used to route the units through; that hour was upon him and he was two men short. He cursed Hitchcock and Tower with a fluency that he would have been incapable of a year ago. Sergeant Dale took a more tolerant view of the matter.

"Anything might have happened and they are only just due now. After all you can't go from Nice to whatever this hell-hole is called on schedule as if it were from Rochester to New York."

"They're sightseeing," the lieutenant said bitterly, forgetting the many times his own car had departed on friendly visits to neighboring towns while his harried sergeant waited for orders.

Dale smiled. "Not them, sir. Tower is reliable and Hitchcock wants to work."

He looked at his watch, then blew a whistle shrilly. "Let's go, you men," he shouted.

They had been in traffic before, but not like this. About them French troops eddied, taking to the fields; a regiment of Moroccans or Algerians, quick-stepping brown men, poured in from a road to the right. The ambulances drew aside while a fleet of camions jammed with French troops roared

through. There were kitchens, caissons and slat wagons; fifty men worked frantically to dig out a bogged gun. The horses that they passed were thin, so thin and poor that they trembled with fatigue while their riders roweled them, urging onward with hoarse cries the teams that dragged the seventy-fives.

Toward nightfall the ambulances cut into a detachment of American infantry stretching as far as the eye could reach, slogging along with stiff un-rhythmic steps, the faces of the men blanched under their helmets, their eyes wide and glazed. They were exhausted, strained to the last point of endurance, their mouths open like panting dogs. Here and there a man would stagger from the column to pitch forward on his face. No one looked at them, no one paused. The sergeants cried, "Close up!"

One of them called to the drivers, "Where we goin'?" but the drivers did not know. They shook their heads, intent on their cars.

"Wherever we're going," they thought, "this time we'll give the Heinies hell."

The sun sank in a bloody pool and they were in a dark forest. When they came out on the other side batteries of eight-inch guns, hidden by the roadside, were firing with deafening crashes and long spits of flame, and they were on the edge of a vast plateau. The sudden twilight of late summer fell

and the sky turned red. In the distance the men could see farms and villages burning, the freshening wind brushing aside the veils of smoke.

At the entrance to a lane the French lieutenant met them, his eyes anxious, his figure no longer debonaire, and led them to what had been a house. The roof was gone and one wall, but it was a shelter. A Red Cross flag hung over the door and inside men were already lying on stretchers.

"*A poste de secours, and your home,*" said the French lieutenant with a gesture.

By ten o'clock all the cars were out; by eleven a stream of wounded was pouring in; at midnight the first car to be smashed ran into a shell hole, an emergency car gathered up the men who were in it, and Holmburg started out.

"Do what you can to fix it," the lieutenant ordered. "But walk. I'm not going to risk the repair car on that road." The mechanic went off, a bag of tools slung over his great shoulders.

The black night was colored by splashes of flame; in them the plain was thick with drifting smoke. To the east there was a confused roaring and nearer a machine gun was playing on the road, its bullets making sparks where they struck stones. Once or twice Holmburg found it expedient to lie in the ditch, but as each burst of shelling receded he rose promptly and hurried on. Ahead of him the wrecked car was a blacker mass in the darkness,

and at once he raised the hood, his expert fingers playing over the engine.

"One front tire burst and the radiator cracked," he said to himself. "Well, I can change the tire and after I heave her outta this damn hole she can run in dry. It won't hurt too much." With his powerful arms straining he pushed back the car, then methodically he set to work.

He was hot when he finished and, standing upright, he paused for breath. A barrage was being laid across the road and fields, where the Germans imagined troops to be. The shells burst in fountains of flame. Overhead a plane was soaring with its deadly intermittent hum. From the enemy lines rockets were rising and curving gracefully in the sky. Points of light—red and green.

"It's kinda pretty," Holmburg said aloud. "Yep, it sure is." He stretched luxuriously and cranked the car for its return trip. Then he chuckled, deep in his throat. "Oh, boy!" he said. "If Jud could see me now!"

At five o'clock four of the drivers, crowded together in the dugout of an advance post, were caught in a flurry of gas shells and staggered in, their reddened eyes weeping, their voices but hoarse whispers. Lieutenant Butt was frantic.

"Four at one crack," he lamented. "What do you think you are, the infantry? Why didn't you put on masks?"

They had, they assured him. Without masks it would have been worse. "There was a wounded guy there without a mask an' he croaked in ten minutes."

"You're not going to be evacuated," the officer announced. "Cassidy's the only one much hurt because of his burns. The rest of you will be all right in a day. I'll have the *médecin chef* of the regiment wash out your eyes. This attack is just developing and I'm not sending back a single man. I don't know how I'll manage now. God damn Tower and Hitchcock," he said with feeling. "We have few enough for relief and after thirty hours you birds will begin sleeping at your wheels. You've got to drive," he said to the new cook. "We can do without food, but we can't do without cars."

"Yes, sir," said the cook, his face expressionless.

"The fact is we need more men," continued the lieutenant. "I can't spare Holmburg—"

"There's me, sir," said Thomas Bender in his high voice.

And so it was arranged since there was really no choice. "It's about time he let Babe drive," said the men. "He don't want his dog-robber hurt, but it ain't fair on us."

Bender himself was elated; a high flush stained his cheeks and his eyes danced.

"Loot," he said, "back in that Maladrerie farm or whatever the name is, when your bedding roll got

wet I put it in the water on purpose. It wasn't a mistake, but I'm very sorry now. I won't do that again."

"I'll see you won't," answered the lieutenant grimly. He had picked up cooties sleeping on a stretcher.

The battle proceeded normally through the morning; that is the wounded reached such proportions that all provision for their transport broke down. It had happened before. The ambulances were overloaded until springs broke; the dressing stations were so choked that stretcher bearers had to make long trips over shelled fields before they could leave their burdens. In the section headquarters at the ruined farm the stretchers filled the courtyard and overflowed into the lane. Once some shells fell near and it seemed as if the place were spotted. Everybody including the lieutenant spent a frantic twenty minutes moving the stretcher cases to the woods. Then the woods were shelled and the stretchers were hurried back again. A French ambulance section was telephoned for to make evacuations to the rear, but apparently it got lost. The *médecin chef* appeared on a tour of inspection and tore his hair.

"Business as usual," said the men.

In the dressing stations some American wounded began appearing. An American division—the 32nd—was operating beside the French. To the ambu-

lance drivers these gaunt, hard men were a novelty; some of them had not spoken to their own country-men for months.

"What's doing up front, buddy?" they asked.

"Hell's broke loose," said the wounded tersely when they could speak at all. "Where do we go from here?"

Rumors filtered through: The troops were progressing, or the line was going back; somebody had been caught in a salient—probably the French. "But then we always are," the ambulance drivers reflected stoically. They had become hardened to such reports. Once and again, until it had become a certainty, the objective of the attack was mispronounced. Juvigny.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the telephone which had been strung into the ambulance headquarters rang. Sergeant Dale answered it.

"*Le Lieutenant Palliser*," he announced, his face expressionless, and handed the instrument to Lieutenant Butt.

The American officer listened intently to what his French companion had to say, then suddenly he choked. The French lieutenant spoke English with exactness and so slowly that every word sounded like an insult. He and the American hated each other as only two men of equal rank whose duties are shared can hate.

"See here, Palliser," Lieutenant Butt yelled with

vigor. "You are here for liaison and to advise only. Whether you rank me in point of time or not, I'll order the disposition of my own men as I see fit!"

There was a clucking in the instrument and Sergeant Dale surmised that their French lieutenant had died of rage. He hoped so. Then a new voice spoke and instantly Lieutenant Butt's face changed. His shoulders drooped deferentially and the knuckles of his clenched hand grew white.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Exactly, sir. I understand. *Oui, mon Général, c'est tout compris.*" He slammed down the receiver.

"It's General Maurier himself," he said bitterly to Sergeant Dale. "What the hell is he doing up here? I thought he stayed back in his fur-lined dugout." He became intent, staring at his nails. "So Palliser went to him. I always said you couldn't trust a Frog."

"It might help some if I knew what happened, sir," the sergeant suggested.

Lieutenant Butt roused himself. "It's Bender. He ran his ambulance full tilt into the motor of Maurier's chief of staff. Oh, God, what rotten luck! Why couldn't he have picked somebody a little less important than a colonel? The ambulance overturned, one of the wounded was killed and another got a broken leg, and after a belly wound, too. Bender isn't hurt and of course you can't knock out those big cars, but the colonel was dis-

turbed. I have Palliser's word for it. 'You weel keep thees man off ze cars until I put him on,' " he mimicked, his voice shaking. "Very well, I will. He doesn't drive again if the war lasts his lifetime. And when he comes in you send Bender to me."

"Very good, sir," Dale answered.

When Bender appeared he looked grave and something of his youth had gone from him. He had been weeping and his face was streaked.

"The poor Frog," he said to one of his companions. "He'd got his in the line—a little one—and he thought that he was safe, then I bump him off. I wish to God that I could bring him back, the poor Frog. But how was I to know that big car would come rushing round that curve?" he demanded defiantly. His sorrow was entirely for the wounded man who had died. As to the sheer treason of ramming the car of a chief of staff he had really no conception.

His face was grave when he went in for his interview with Lieutenant Butt, but when he came out it was absolutely white. He was trembling so that for a moment he had to support himself against the door. Men spoke briefly to him, but he was mute. After a time he went away beneath a tree and sat down. Presently in the overpowering, the intolerable pressure of work he was forgotten.

At five o'clock Henderson came to Sergeant Dale. "Look at what I found stuck on my duffle

bag," he said, his voice strange. Dale took the piece of paper which he held out and read it:

"DEAR JACK:

"The loot says I'm no better than a murderer and I guess he's right. He says I'm no good around here and I guess it's true. I can't drive a car and I can't do anything but shine his boots, so I'm going off with the Americans where I may do some good. I don't give a damn about this outfit and I'm sick of being kicked around like a ball, but I'd like to have you know.

"BABE."

"Give me that paper!" said the sergeant. "I could have told Butt this would happen. I've seen it in China and I've seen it in the Philippines." His speech became strange. "Pap-fed, that's all. An army is an army, but a nursery is something else. Don't *you* stand there gawping!" he cried. "Get back on your car."

Fifteen minutes later as a frenzied conference was ending Jerry Tower appeared.

It was to the sergeant that he made his first report.

"Hitchcock," said the sergeant. "That's pretty tough. Died in line of duty of course. Well, his folks will get ten thousand bucks. But we could certainly use him now." Abruptly he stopped contemplating a situation which was irretrievably be-

yond his repair. "How come you trail in two days late?" he demanded.

"I went to the old farm and found you gone," Jerry told him. "Then I had to locate where you'd moved to, and most of the way I had to hoof it. The traffic is fierce."

"I know all about the traffic," Sergeant Dale interrupted. "How long did you stay in Eplessier?"

Jerry reddened. "Only a night and a day. How did you know?"

"Listen. About the time you were born I was doing my first stretch in the army, and I've done another since. I've heard better excuses than you'll pull in your whole life, and I know men. I'm not asking what your side trip was for, but you certainly have bitched things up," Dale answered. He explained about Bender. "If you had been here—one extra man—we could have kept him off the cars."

"I'm sorry," said Jerry. Suddenly the futility and the egotism of his visit was made clear to him. "It's a fact," he thought. "You can't mix sentiment and war."

He spoke aloud. "I'm going in to report to Lieutenant Butt. Probably he'll have me on the rockpile, but that's all right."

"You're going to do what I tell you to do." Sergeant Dale's voice was harsh. "And one of the things you are not going to do is spill that story to

the loot—he's wild enough now. There's a time for confession, but this isn't it. What do you suppose we're here for? To get out the wounded and keep peace with the French. But first of all to get out the wounded.

"Now listen to what I say: The first thing to do is to get Bender back. That's up to you. Probably he won't have got much beyond the Frog first line dressing stations; they're likely to think he's shell-shocked and hold him, but anyway you speak French. Ordinarily I'd let the little fool take his chances or be picked up by a provost guard in the rear, but that wouldn't do now. If he should get through to an American officer with some cock-and-bull story there'd be hell to pay. That's what's upsetting the loot; we don't want any report turned in about the section and, by God, there won't be." The muscles in his gray face quivered. "I've got some pride in this outfit. Now go in and let Lieutenant Butt lecture you, then come back to me and I'll give you a map with the dressing stations marked on it where Bender has probably headed. We can spare you for you don't know the layout yet well enough to drive for a few hours anyway."

Obediently Jerry turned to go.

"Keep your mouth shut about Eplessier," Dale warned him. "Tell him the traffic held you up." A thin smile touched his lips. Then he moved off to other duties.

"Words," he thought wearily. "This damn army's run on 'em." It was a fact that the top sergeant had not spoken so volubly for months.

He was decidedly more terse when Jerry was about to leave. "It wouldn't be healthy for you to come back without Bender," he said significantly, and Jerry understood.

Mail had been received some time before and there was one letter for Jerry. From his mother, he saw, and read it as he walked along the road. The usual gossip of Waynesboro. There had been a wedding.

"Ha!" cried Jerry. "That bird married and not caught in the draft yet?" Sudden irritation possessed him, but he read on. It had been a wet summer—everybody said it was the guns in Europe. Mrs. Tower's garden had been ruined—all but the larkspur. Jerry skipped that. His father, he learned, was not very well; his efforts for the Liberty Loan had told on him, Mrs. Tower complained gently. "He misses you. Why do our boys have to stay away so long?" There was an injunction about damp socks.

Jerry crumpled the letter into a ball and hurled it from him. "They can't understand!" he cried. A mile or so ahead men were being blown to fragments; the stream of tortured wounded was unceasing, and his father was not so well. Indigestion probably. His digestion was never good.

The road along which he had been walking was bordered by fields of stubble-wheat pockmarked with shell-holes. Here and there the broad plain was broken by copses of shattered trees or a bit of wall and every spot sheltered a battery of guns. Seventy-fives and one hundred and fives, they blazed away with an infernal roar. The Germans were replying with heavier guns which sent great geysers of earth into the smoky air.

Jerry found the first dressing station without difficulty and in it a young *aspirant* named Descat, whom he knew. He questioned him, but nothing had been seen of Bender. The dressing station had been hollowed in a bank; it was stifling hot and smelled of blood.

"Will you not remain?" Descat asked politely. "I am not so busy that I can not talk." He had stripped off his blouse and shirt and his arms were red to the elbows. Swarms of flies hung above the wounded men who packed the dugout, drifting overhead with maddening buzzing. Underfoot masses of used bandages were being ground into the earth.

"I regret that it is impossible," Jerry answered as politely. "A charming spot. But I must find my friend."

"*Bien*," said Descat. "Try the *retai* of the One hundred and twenty-seventh. It is somewhere yonder beyond the ravine. If you see an ambulance

or even so much as one stretcher bearer kindly send him up."

"I will," Jerry promised and they parted with mutual esteem.

But it was not so easy to reach the dressing-station of the One hundred and twenty-seventh regiment. The right of the ravine was being shelled too heavily and Jerry had to make a long detour. When he finally got into the ravine he found it filled with water in which was sunk barbed wire. Eventually he got out on the other side.

"This is a hell of a job," he thought. "If I so much as lay my hands on Babe I'll break his neck."

The second dressing station was not unlike the first except that there were more men, more flies and more blood in it. Also there were machine guns not fifty yards away firing from a slight elevation across the plain. The Germans were retaliating with heavy caliber shells that shook the ground.

"It is hot here," Jerry said uncomfortably after a jagged piece of metal had screamed through the air into whining silence. "Too hot."

"The Boche do not like our wasps," the doctor in charge answered placidly. "Evidently they do not like our little affair at all."

There was, it appeared, news of Bender. A stretcher bearer had seen an American walking across the fields, avoiding the dressing station. It

was supposed that this was a runner from the division beside them, but the description fitted.

"Oh, Lord," Jerry thought, "he'll beat me into the American lines after all."

"It would be well to remain," advised the doctor. "At least until the next ambulance comes out. It will soon be dark."

"It will be darker yet before I get back, Monsieur," Jerry answered gloomily. The thought of wandering around these fields all night filled him with dismay.

Juvigny was burning. Across the shadowed plain its fires leaped and fell, rising in great flames, and sinking to incandescent coals. The noise of the guns was making Jerry deaf. In a momentary lull he caught himself shouting and everybody was shouting around him. A fleet of German airplanes swooped from nowhere and fled across the sky. Other planes, French or American, rose to meet them and the air was filled with sharp bursts from the anti-aircraft guns below.

"Come on," said Jerry to himself. "Let's go."

There was no road now, but a path, evidently made by cattle, showed clearly defined in the short burned grass and he followed it. Suddenly it grew very dark, save where in a semi-circle the horizon was ringed with flame. Jerry lost the path and found it again. He lost it and then he was in a grove of trees, shattered by fire, their half-stripped branches

rigid and stark. There was a faint smell of gas in the woods and nervously he opened his mask. There were dead men in the woods too, he discovered, after he had stepped on a lax hand. Stooping, he saw that the uniform was French.

It was so dark now that he could not see the trees that blocked his path; it was impossible also to see Juvigny by the flames of which he had been guiding himself. A shell crashed down behind him, dangerously close.

"Oh, Lord!" cried Jerry. "I've got to get out of here." He began running, but the trees impeded him. A branch swept his face, brushing his helmet off, but by luck he found it. For an instant the thought of going on without a helmet started pulses of panic beating in his throat. He moved more carefully, his arms outstretched before him, and at once the trees grew thinner. The path was before him again and he saw that he had merely lost it in the woods.

It was useless to go on; in the night it would be impossible to find Bender although he must have come this way. But while it was useless to go on his return was blocked. The first shell had been but a forerunner of others and now the heavies were crashing down again in the wood filled only with the dead. Jerry hurried through the fields, hoping to skirt the trees, but when he was clear of them he found that he had lost his way. The firing seemed

to have spread to all sides and there was no front and there was no rear.

His ears were deafened and his eyes pained in the continual stabs of flame. Lethargy of spirit and a great burden of fatigue had come on him. He had walked all the previous night and he had hardly slept the night before. In his escape from Nice he had found no rest. His feet felt heavy and his head was hot. Tears stung his eyes until he thought it must be gas.

"Damn Bender," he muttered.

Before him was the remnant of a house and he entered. There had been others before him. The courtyard was a litter of débris and beside a scattered wall he saw the outline of a body, stark, its arms folded. There were other bodies in the single room, caught by the shell that had exploded on the roof. Jerry stumbled over the belt of a machine gun to kneel beside these men. Their faces were lead-colored and they were dead. His hand touched a helmet; it was round and roughened as if the surface had been rubbed with sandpaper. Jerry felt their uniforms, their shoes. They were Americans.

"Who's there?" asked a faint voice.

Jerry could hear his heart pumping wildly, heavily, with uneven strokes. He wet his lips. "I'm an American driver attached to a French outfit," he managed to say at last.

Through the room trickled a thread of laughter, pain-filled but irrepressible and young.

"Babe!" Jerry cried. Bender had found his Americans.

The boy was lying in a corner, his knees drawn up.

"What in hell are you doing here?" Jerry demanded. "Get up off your back!"

"Don't touch me!" Bender's voice was faintly querulous. "My belly is full of slugs and I'm trying to hold it in."

Cautiously Jerry placed his hand on the other's uniform. It was sticky, wet with blood. "Don't move," he commanded urgently. "I've got a first-aid pack here."

"But I've already used two," Thomas Bender admitted, his voice fainter now.

Desperate, impracticable schemes rushed through Jerry's mind. He would struggle back for a car or stretchers; he would go on to the lines demanding help. Frantic, he discarded these. He would carry the boy himself.

"Don't go," said Bender.

They crouched there in the darkness while the minutes passed. After a time Bender said fretfully, "It's getting cold."

It was hot with a dreadful sticky heat that turned the body moist. "It's not cold, old-timer," Jerry answered huskily.

"Well, I'm cold." The voice was petulant, spoiled as ever, but no longer high. It was very low.

Carefully Jerry drew him into his arms; he spread his blouse across the boy's knees. "Is that better?" he asked. The head on his shoulder grew heavy as if Bender slept.

But he was not asleep. His breathing became harsh and irregular, then he whispered, "Kid, what the hell's this war about?" Jerry could not answer. It was not until some time later that he realized Bender had died.

The battle rose and waned, it rose again more furiously, beating against the sky, its smoke blotting out the stars. Jerry still sat there, the dead machine-gun men opposite him, the dead boy in his arms. There was nothing to do and no place to go. Almost at dawn he slept.

When he awoke it was broad day. The two strange soldiers lay crumpled where they had fallen, the bodies sprawled loosely as if they had been stuffed with old rags, dummies, it seemed, with no more than a grotesque resemblance to men, and already in the air there was, hardly perceptible, the odor of decay. But Bender lay tranquil as if he were asleep, his face placid and very young. If he had known regret or fear or bitterness these were gone now. Jerry did not look at the wound which had killed him, nor did he touch his blouse which

he had spread over the boy. It was soaked with Bender's blood. He was stiff and weary, dazed with uneasy sleep, but through his physical exhaustion a sense of catastrophe was growing—a realization of the part he had played in Bender's death; more, a conviction that he was directly responsible for it. He strove to put it from him, assuring himself that this was after all only the fruits of war, but he could not.

It was, however, hardly the consequences that he feared; reason acquitted him of deliberation in the tragedy, or of more than unintentional thoughtlessness at worst, but it was the conviction that something infinitely precious had been shattered by his careless hand—a life and the spirit which animated it that could never be replaced—that disturbed him.

He would have remained by the dead boy had there been anything that he could do for him, but his opportunities for service, which during Babe's life had been immeasurable, had found fulfillment in the one pathetically futile gesture of drawing his blouse over a body chilled by approaching death.

The wrecked room had become intolerable to him. It was filled with the ghosts, not of those who had died, but of the opportunities which he had lost, and Jerry could not stay. He went to the door and in the glare of morning light with the

consciousness of a living world still about him, his anguished nerves found relief.

Juvigny still burned, but less fiercely now. The artillery continued to rave, but it was impossible to tell how the battle was going. Through the yellow haze the sun filtered like molasses, sticky and hot, and spread across the plain. Jerry stood in the entrance to the courtyard trying to locate his bearings.

"I came through a ravine," he thought, "and then there were some trees." He looked earnestly beyond the farm. "Yes, by golly, those are the trees." But beyond it was another grove shattered by shell fire and to the left of it still another.

"I'll take the nearest," he decided. "If it's full of French dead I'll know that I'm back in our own sector."

But the woods were shallower than those through which he had passed the night before and there seemed to be no dead at all. Instead there was a confusion of abandoned material—shells in straw cases, a little cart with iron-bound wheels, some helmets and guns. Jerry looked at the helmets.

"Boche!" he cried. Instantly the place became alien and sinister. Precipitately he hurried to the farther side. "But they're not here," he reassured himself. "This must be the result of yesterday's fight."

Beyond the woods he raised his head and squinted

at the sun. "But it was almost directly in front of me when Dale sent me out," he thought, "and now it's over there. It would be of course. That was evening and now it's just up. I'm all right."

He lowered his head and set out confidently on his way. Then he became aware that he was not alone. Along the edge of the woods were men, two score or more, leaning against the trees or lying down, half hidden in the short grass. They were looking at him with unwavering intensity.

"My God!" cried Jerry, and then he saw that they were wearing the American uniform. There were guns beside them; his eye caught the glitter of a bayonet. One of them beckoned him to approach.

This man was dressed in the uniform of a doughboy complete even to the shoes, but on one shoulder were a captain's bars. His face was lean and streaked with dirt and across his forehead was a long cut.

"Well, where'd you come from?" he demanded.

Jerry stood at attention. "I'm an ambulance driver attached to General Maurier's French division, sir," he explained.

"Well, you've got a French helmet on—not that that proves anything," said the officer. He looked at the soldier more closely. "What outfit did you say?"

Jerry gave the number of his organization. The

captain turned to an orderly behind him. "He seems sane," he remarked, "but I never heard anything like it. No, never." He turned again to Jerry. "There aren't any ambulances running out this far," he stated. "And besides where's yours?"

"I haven't any, sir," Jerry answered steadily. "My lieutenant sent me out on foot—on a mission."

"Jesus!" cried the captain. "Have I gone crazy? An American private in a French helmet sent by his lieutenant on a mission in the American lines! I suppose you are a private, although I don't see your blouse. If you tell me you're a major I'm going to be evacuated."

"I got lost, sir," Jerry answered. "I wasn't supposed to come this far."

"Well, it's possible," the captain muttered. "We've been lost too."

A voice from the woods broke in: "If that bird can get an ambulance I'd like to move my wounded, captain. The gully's hot as hell and there's no water." Jerry looked at the man with a Red Cross brassard on his arm who had spoken.

"Shut up!" said the captain.

"Where are you going now?" he asked Jerry.

"Back to my outfit, sir, in the French lines."

"In that direction?"

"Yes, sir."

The orderly raised his eyes to heaven as if he

had given up all hope, but the captain spoke very gently:

"We're all going in that direction, but not just now. No, not just now. It isn't feasible. You see the Huns are over there."

He spoke to his orderly, earnestly and audibly. "Probably it's shell shock, but I'm not going to take him in. The first thing you know he'll be running loco up and down the gully among the wounded, and we've got to advance. Anyway he's not in our outfit and I never heard of his."

He took Jerry by the arm and swung him around.

"You see that line of trees over there? Well, somewhere in there is where the French are—at least their P.C. is. I'm going to send you back, but before I do I'll say I've sent two runners over so far, and neither has got through. The Heinies are shelling the fields this side and it's quite a bit away. Now I've told you and it's up to you. When you get there, if you do, tell them to telephone your General Moray or whatever his name is to keep his damned guns out of my troops. We're supposed to be getting support from the French seventy-fives, but a hell of a lot of support it is. He's busted up the company and we've had to fall back. Tell him to raise his fire or stop it or shoot at the moon." For a moment his face twisted with rage. "I don't give a damn what he does so long as he stops holding up my men. Can you say that?"

Jerry repeated the message in more formal English. Then irritation seized him. Whether this captain believed him or not he had but done his duty. He disliked being taken for a shell-shocked man running loose, and he was angry that the service in which he took such pride should not be recognized.

"General Maurier's artillery might understand the message more easily, sir, if I repeated it in French," he said smoothly. "Like this." The words ran glibly from his tongue.

The captain stared at him. "You can say it in Spanish so long as you get it over," he observed. Suddenly he extended his hand. "I guess you're all right. Be on your way, soldier, and good luck. Now get the hell out of here."

Jerry grinned. "Yes, sir," he cried and started off at a jog trot.

"They're regular," he thought. He glanced back once at the lean, tired faces raised above the grass and a thrill touched him. "They're my crowd. I've been so long with the French that I've forgotten. But Babe certainly wouldn't have been happy with the Americans. No, not much."

The line of trees obsessed him. These trees had seemed quite near, but as he trotted on they appeared to recede. For some minutes he descended into a gully and they were lost to view. This gully ran east and west and there was a dried watercourse

in it. Men had fought here recently and the place was littered with windrows of dead—Americans all facing one way. What had killed them was apparent, for at the end of the gully were machine guns, wrecked in the fury of the combat, and around them were clustered their crews. They had stood and fought and they had died fighting. There still were clubbed rifles in dead hands. Jerry did not linger.

When he had crawled up the opposite side of the ravine he saw why the runners of the captain had not got through. The fields here were being shelled with a steady methodical shelling that tossed clouds of brown earth and white smoke into the air. The ground seemed to be reeling in a continuous tremble and the sound of the explosions had merged in a steady roar.

For a moment Jerry's heart sickened, then he hitched in his belt. He thought bitterly of the captain and more bitterly of his own lieutenant who had sent him out. "This is what Babe wanted to do," he thought. "Well, by God, I wish he could." Then a shadow of philosophy rose to comfort him. "If I do stop one I'll never know it," he said aloud. Then he began to run.

He bent very low, but he ran straight, not wasting effort in zigzag turns. His eyes stared ahead at the line of trees. It was nearer now. There was an intolerable crashing of metal around him; his

mouth hung open and his gasping lungs dragged in smoke. Halfway across the trembling fields something—a huge wind—picked him up and tossed him off his feet. There was a blunt, tearing pain in his side. Jerry screamed once. It would be easy to lie still, to hide there beneath that kindly veil of smoke while the blackness flowed up before his eyes, but something was urging him on; voices were yelling at him, mocking him; there was a tremendous stamping of feet.

"They're giving me the razz," he thought. Then he got to his knees, raised up and staggered on. It was no longer black before his eyes, but red. All the earth and sky were red; he too was turning red. He pressed his hand to his side and it was crimson in the red light.

"My guts," he thought. "They're falling out like Babe's. Oh, Christ!"

The noise was growing faint. "I can't hear," Jerry muttered. "It's the end." There were trees about him and the day grew dark. One thought only was beating against his brain: "I must speak French. If I don't they won't understand. I must speak French."

Startled faces were rising about him and there were exclamations that he could not hear. A dugout was before him, hollowed in a mossy bank; the raw brown earth of it had been thrown carelessly upon a carpet of green. From the dugout

stretched wires, yellow, red and blue, trailing off sinuously through the underbrush to headquarters and the supporting batteries somewhere in the rear. There was a telephone operator by the entrance to the cave. The P.C. at last.

"You are firing the seventy-fives into the American infantry," Jerry cried, his voice a high wail.

Something was speaking to him—a voice was shouting into his ear. "No! No! No! No!" Jerry pressed his hand to his side and began again:

"*Messieurs, l'artillerie française, les soixante-quinze*—" His voice ran steadily, coldly on to the end of his report.

There were exclamations of dismay. Some one had called an order. An officer with a pair of field glasses was speaking to him, but Jerry did not hear. Blackness was flowing up over him, washing out the men, the noise, the light. "*Messieurs*," he began again as if his work were not done. He moved a step uncertainly toward the dugout, then he pitched forward upon the hard earth.

PART FIVE

IT was quiet in the convent and very cool. Outside the sun beat on a walled garden and a white statue of Christ, but inside the walls of gray stone and the narrow windows kept out the light. It was quiet in the convent and the nuns who walked between the rows of white beds moved softly, their black robes swishing about their feet. Occasionally a rosary jingled.

Besides the younger nuns who worked, there was one orderly for each ward—aged soldiers with drooping mustaches and battered faces, all looking exactly alike. The young soldiers in the beds spoke to them at intervals listlessly or watched their passage with weary eyes, then groaning, turned again to sleep. Often the orderly slept too, hunched forward in his chair at the end of his ward.

Into this place, heavy with tranquillity and peace, where time had ceased to matter because the house was so old, Jerry was brought. The rumble of the guns had faded to a distant humming no louder than the drone of the bees in the garden outside;

no airplane soared overhead in the blackness of these moonless nights, but for Jerry it was not quiet. Around him the guns still barked in shattering crashes and his eyes were filled with bursts of fire. He was running through a barrage, slipping and falling on the heaving ground. Something had struck him and his side was burning, swelling enormously, like a balloon filled with flame. Darkness was creeping over him, but it was red. There was a tremendous stamping of feet.

"They're giving me the razz!" he cried and struggled on.

There were moments when he was completely lucid, when he knew where he was and what was going on. He could remember too. They had taken him from the trees and he was in a damp stone room. A young Frenchman was about to inject antitetanus serum and he gritted his teeth against the new, sharp pain. There had been an interval of blackness and then he was being transferred from one ambulance to another—a larger one painted French blue. The driver of the first car was looking at him with startled eyes. Henderson of his own outfit. He remembered speaking to Henderson and they had shaken hands, but what he had said or what Henderson had said to him he did not know.

All this he remembered, while he watched the ward with shadowed eyes, then the delirium would set in again and he was among shells.

A French doctor in a surgical coat looked at his fever chart while he talked to a nun. "It is not too serious a wound," he protested, "but the temperature mounts—always up. If he had been operated on in one of the American hospitals where, as my brother tells me, they take two thousand cases a day I could understand that something was wrong. But France is more careful of her men." He smiled. "We have not so many. Moreover, did I not operate myself?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Major," murmured the nun.

The doctor rubbed his hands as if he had solved a problem. "Then it is a question of his mind," he announced. "Something distresses his mind and when you have found out what then the fever will go down. *V'la!*" They went on to the next bed.

The nun, however, after searching her conscience decided to do nothing about it. This man was a stranger and she spoke no English. Also she worked sixteen hours a day and prayed two. In the time that was left she preferred to sleep. Who shall blame her? Before the war Sister Maxene had spent her life in contemplation; it had been refining to the soul, but she herself had grown fat. Since the war she had learned to nurse, to cook, to wash. She wrote letters, saw relatives and ran errands. She handled the bodies of men, induced them to live and prepared them for death, and now she

weighed one hundred pounds. She had the greatest respect for the doctor and she decided to remember the young American more firmly in her prayers, but she declined to investigate the troubles of his mind. Moreover he was going to die. In four years she had learned the symptoms of death.

So Jerry was left to stare blankly at the fever chart above his bed where the red line went scaling to the heights. He was not alone for Thomas Bender came and sat beside him. He sat there throughout the night and reproached Jerry for letting him die. "If you hadn't gone to Eplessier I'd be here now," he said in his high young voice.

"I didn't make you run off," Jerry protested. "I didn't make you, Babe." But Bender would not be convinced. He leaned forward, clasping his stomach and his child-like face was haggard in the night light.

"Don't touch me," he whispered. "My belly's full of slugs and I'm trying to hold it in."

"I didn't mean it, Babe," Jerry cried so loudly that the old orderly came running down the hall.

"*Tais-toi!*" he muttered. "Would you wake up every bed?"

Toward evening one day a young soldier was brought into the ward. Supper had been served at the long table for all those who could sit up and the remains of bread and soup had been cleared away. In the close a bell had been rung for evensong

and the nuns had filed off, two by two, the old and bent going first, the young ones bringing up the rear.

The clear, warm notes of the bell roused Jerry from his stupor and through half-closed lids he watched the man who had just been brought in. He was slight and fair, his cheeks were hollowed and there were blue circles beneath his eyes. He talked to the stretcher bearers in a high-pitched voice and when they had gone away he talked to the orderly. He wore breeches, but his blouse and shirt were gone and there was a wide bandage bound across his bare chest. Once he laughed, a gay, excited sound, until he coughed and when he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand there were flecks of blood on it. The orderly spoke to him disapprovingly and shook his head.

Jerry watched with interest. The room was now a dressing station, larger than any in which he had been, and he grew indignant at the way it was run. The orderly knelt beside the bed where the young soldier sat and helped him draw off his breeches.

"That guy'll catch cold," Jerry thought. "They ought to leave on his pants and wrap him in blankets."

The orderly shuffled away and presently returned with a pail of water. This he placed beside the bed. "Wash your feet," he said briefly and departed for his evening nap.

"Descat would shoot any stretcher bearer who would do that," Jerry said aloud: "It's a hell of a note, making a man take a bath in the lines. Get him away from the guns—that's all that counts."

"The American is babbling again," one of the wounded men observed to the orderly, but the orderly did not answer. He was asleep.

Jerry was relieved to see that the young soldier did not bathe even his feet. He was silent now as if his burst of gayety had exhausted him and he slumped wearily back on the bed. It seemed even an effort for his fingers to draw up the sheet. He lay, his face turned to one side on the pillow, the night light shining on it and through his fair hair.

"I knew it," Jerry said suddenly. "It's Babe."

He slipped out of bed and for all the anguish in his mind he felt surprisingly well. Why had they put him to bed? He walked down the hall until he was beside the bed of the young soldier.

"I didn't think you'd do this, Babe," he said reproachfully. "I can stand you after midnight, but I can't stand you so soon."

The wounded man looked up at him uncomprehendingly. "I'll admit now it was my fault," Jerry continued. "It was right to go to Eplessier to tell Renée, but it wasn't right to stay that extra day for the old woman. That was letting down my outfit and it was letting down you. I thought you had a belly wound, Babe, but it's your shoulder that was

hurt. Well, I've told you now, and that's all that I can do. I haven't slept for weeks, kid, and I want peace."

The young soldier laughed at the strange words, gaspingly until his lips were red. "*Ça va, mon vieux,*" he said. "*Ça va bien.*"

"Imagine you speaking French!" Jerry cried. "Well, I'm glad you take it so easy for it's been on my mind."

The old orderly was running down the hall. "*Tiens! Tiens!*" he said crossly and taking Jerry by the arm he led him back to bed.

"So long, Babe," Jerry cried. "I can bear to see you now."

That night, the eighth since he had been wounded, the fever broke in a cooling sweat.

The next day he felt weak, but his mind was clear. The throbbing in his side had diminished; there was no longer in the exact sense of the word pain, but rather a stiffness as if the wound was drawing close. He could lie back on his pillow and smile at the young soldier, across the hall and four beds away. The soldier smiled back. They could even speak.

"It is curious," Jerry said in French. "Last night I dreamed you were a friend of mine—a friend who—well, who was in the war. But now in daylight I see that you are not at all alike." Even this much exhausted him and he became silent.

"I am flattered to be mistaken for a friend," the boy murmured with great politeness. "Last night you were speaking English." He too was disinclined for words and they said no more, but the spirit of comradeship reached out across the ward toward each other.

"Just the same he is like Babe," Jerry thought. "A very nice kid, I can see that. And about the same age. Babe was probably just a nice kid too if anybody had taken the trouble to find out, but we—I never did. With a little guidance I could have made a man out of him."

It was true enough, he thought, that the boy had been ready to worship. Plastic clay beneath his hands. His, Jerry's, intentions had been admirable, but there had always been a reason for deferring putting them into practice. Some one more companionable was going to a café, or he was tired or Bender had merely irritated him. There was always a reason for avoiding giving the boy the only thing he needed—the friendly and sobering advice of an older man, but in effect there was no reason. There had been excellent qualities there—generosity, impulsiveness, great courage, but they had been unguided.

"He was self-willed, but I was selfish," Jerry continued to himself. "A kid of sixteen thrown among men and some of us are pretty hard-boiled. There was only Henderson to give him a helping hand and

he was too lazy to kick him off. Hitchy used to think of himself and I laughed at him, but if there is any one who has thought consistently of himself all the way through it is me. I thought that I was pretty fine, but I've been just a skunk."

He was submerged with regret for his lost opportunities; he was confronted again with the finality, the utter decisiveness, of death, Bender's death, and because he was weak tears came into his eyes. But he could lie there and watch the young Frenchman, feeling that through him Thomas Bender who had been sacrificed still smiled.

The boy across the ward was not smiling now. His head turned more wearily on the pillow and at six o'clock he refused soup. Soon after he demanded water which he drank thirstily in great gulps. Almost at once he was vomiting in the basin which the orderly held, water tinged with blood.

Jerry called the orderly to him. "That boy is very ill," he said. "It is necessary to call the *médecin chef*."

"Monsieur le major is not on duty," the orderly answered imperturbably.

"But he may die!"

"With an internal hemorrhage from the lung he will certainly die," the orderly informed him. "We know that. Now go to sleep."

"It's an outrage!" Jerry cried, choking on his own weakness. "Something might be done."

The orderly smiled, a very wise, tired smile. "It

is for you young ones to do it then," he said. "Stop war. But do not ask the old men. We are safe."

That was the exact answer, Jerry decided bitterly. The old men were safe and safely they had spun their webs until the world burned and the youth of the world died in their fires.

Sister Maxene came to him. "What is this?" she cried. "For a week you are unconscious and then you wake speaking French."

"Sister, get the doctor," he implored her. "For the soldier who came in yesterday."

"Monsieur le major does not sleep in the convent."

"But he will die."

"My child," the nun answered gently and laid a soothing hand on his hot head, "so will I and you—all of us. Do not fear for that young boy; he goes to kind hands." She fluttered away in her dark robes.

"The old crow!" Jerry thought. "She doesn't understand."

The evening wore on and the night lamp was lighted. The wick glimmered in its pool of oil and cast long shadows down the ward. One by one the wounded men dropped off to sleep after a muttered word. Almost always they were silent as if drawing in to themselves strength for the next great battle when they should be well. Their faces when untouched by pain were resigned or stupid. In four

years they had forgotten how to work or how to live. Existence held only one purpose—to fight.

Jerry did not sleep. He lay staring across the ward. At midnight the old orderly came and drew a screen about the French boy's bed; then he returned to his chair. Jerry knew what the screen meant. His quickened ears caught the slightest sound, the slipping of fingers over sheets, or the gasping of a shallow breath. Bender was dying again, and for him Bender would be forever dying through the nights of years while Jerry waited for the end. Once the orderly tiptoed down the ward and peered behind the screen before returning to his chair.

At four o'clock he summoned two stretcher-bearers who came clumsily in spite of the old man's hiss for silence and carried the body to the chapel. There, Sister Maxene, roused at last, hurried and sacrificed another hour of sleep while she prayed for the dead boy.

Jerry turned his face to the wall. Day came and coffee was served by a young girl in a smock too big for her. Jerry did not take it. The doctor came and poked his wound, but he did not move. They took his temperature and with raised eyebrows extended the red line on his chart.

"What is this?" asked the nun. "Last night you spoke French, and to-day you will not speak at all."

Jerry, his face turned away, one hand across his eyes, did not answer.

The doctor made pouting sounds with his lips. "Without the will to live—" he muttered and shrugged. They left him for more hopeful tasks.

The girl who was walking down the ward was slim and straight. She wore a uniform of dark blue and on her burnished hair was an overseas cap also of blue serge. At each bed she stopped and offered the soldier in it an orange from the basket that she carried on her arm. Sister Maxene followed a few steps behind, acquiescent but vaguely disapproving of this strange woman who, armed with authority from the *médecin chef*, had invaded her ward. But the wounded men watched the girl with interest, raising themselves on elbows the better to see and accepting the fruit with murmured words of thanks.

"I never know what to say to them, Sister," the girl said in a low voice over her shoulder. "I never can tell them what I think."

"Treat them like children," answered the nun. "They understand that."

"Ah, but they know so much," said the girl. "I think sometimes they know everything." There were shadowy violet circles beneath her eyes and the lids drooped for an instant, quivering.

"This young girl is overwrought," thought the nun. "She has seen too much of war—or not enough." But she said nothing; it was not her duty

to compound a philosophy suitable for every worker who came to the wards.

They came to an empty bed. "Do not leave fruit here," said Sister Maxene. "He died, that one, last night. Although it is now five o'clock the bed has not yet been filled. I think things must be going better at the front."

There were only a few oranges left in the basket. Those soldiers at the end of the room were looking anxious. Intent, like children, they watched the diminishing pile.

"Nor will it be necessary to leave fruit here," said the nun. "This man is in a daze and grows weaker. Presently I think he will die." Her voice was matter-of-fact, slightly irritated to conceal the dismay she felt. "It is unfortunate that he can not take your fruit, Mademoiselle, for he is an American like yourself. My only American."

The basket had dropped to the floor and the remaining oranges were rolling beneath the beds. Instantly, trained in humility, the nun stooped to pick them up. The girl did not notice. She stood at the end of the bed, her hands clenched over the white iron, and stared down at the man in it. His breath came noisily through half-parted lips and his face was flushed. Sister Maxene straightened up with the recovered fruit. "We will now continue our tour," she suggested patiently.

But the girl did not move. "You say he will die?" she asked, her words a breath.

Sister Maxene shrugged. "That rests with God. For my own part I believe—" She did not finish the sentence. "If you wish to remain with your countryman I will give out the rest of this fruit." She moved away a few steps and then returned. "It is not the wound, Mademoiselle," she said half defiantly. "Grave but not fatal; and he has had all the care of our own. Only he has no will to live."

"I understand," the girl answered. "Everything has been done—of course."

The nun turned away and presently at the end of the hall her voice could be heard, raised in kindly scolding. "*Tiens, André*, tears because there is no more fruit. And you a corporal! Did you weep before the Germans at Vavincourt? Not you. Never mind, my child, I shall bring you an apple from the kitchen stores."

Save for the sound of oranges being munched there was quiet in the ward. The girl stepped to the head of the bed and looked at the name on the chart above it. Then she sat down on the stool beside the bed and leaned forward.

"Jerry," she said. "Jerry Tower."

For a moment the man's breathing trembled into silence, then it began again and his figure had not moved. It had grown darker in the convent hall,

and then the sinking sun striking athwart the roofs came through a narrow window, falling across the bed and the stool. It fell, a golden haze, through the deepening dusk that rose as if to blot it out.

"Jerry," the girl whispered again, her voice imperative.

The guns which beat upon his brain were fading; they were fainter now, almost gone. He was again in a strange wood and the dying sun filled the glade. It came through the window and door of the wooden house; it caught in her hair and turned it to flame; it filled her eyes with light until his own were dazzled. Slowly he opened his eyes.

"Jerry," she said very clearly.

"I dreamed about you," he answered thickly through dry lips. "This is another dream."

She took his hand in hers. "It is real," she told him. "Do you know that it is real?"

The sunlight was fading; it was almost gone, but in the obscurity that crept upon them she thought that he had smiled.

"Would you kiss a private?" he asked. "A buck private?" The tremulous thread of her laughter broke in on the mist that was rising again about him. It seemed to echo on and on through the darkened recesses of his mind.

"My dear," she said, "I would."

But when the nun returned there was no laughter in the girl's voice and her face was tense. She

raised her free hand in a gesture of warning. "He has spoken," she whispered, "and now he is asleep."

"He is delirious," Sister Maxene told her. "And now it is time to go."

The lax fingers that lay about the girl's tightened. "Don't go," said Jerry.

The nun made an enormous concession. She broke the rules of the convent. "For an hour then," she said. "Until the gates close."

The orderly came and lit the night light and the wounded men prepared to sleep, turning on their beds with uneasy murmurs while the girl still sat until the hand that clutched hers grew limp.

"But I knew him," she thought in a sort of wonder, "long before we ever met in France."

It was again late the next afternoon before it was possible for her to visit the convent hospital, and this time she brought no oranges. Sister Maxene met her at the entrance to the ward.

"He is better," she said. "A tiny bit, and the fever has dropped like this." She measured a fractional space with her fingers.

The girl's eyes lighted. "He will live?"

But the nun was dubious. "What can one do when the mind orders the body not to carry on? He is very sick, Mademoiselle."

"I will talk to him," said the girl.

She sat by the bed and considered what she should say. Within herself the war had wrought

such havoc that she wanted to take every victim of it into her arms offering measureless pity. But this was no time for that.

"I must pull myself together," she thought. "I'm getting sloppy and sentimental and it's hurting my work. If I'm to do any good I must brace up. Worse, it's hurting me. Pretty soon I'd better ask for a transfer to a Paris office where I won't see things like this." But her heart cried, "All I want to do is hold his hand. All I want to do is make it easier for him."

Aloud she said, "Jerry, this is Allison Porter come to see you again. I promised that I would. Now wake up, you beastly little coward."

He was awake suddenly, staring at her, his black eyes enormous in his white face.

"You'd like to kill me for saying that," she continued lightly. "Well, you may if you get better, for I meant it. But they tell me you won't get better, Jerry. They tell me you're going to die—because you want to. That's not sporting, and it isn't very brave. We didn't send men over here to die from nothing."

His eyes were watching her intently, never moving from her face. "I'll never forgive myself," she thought wretchedly, "if it's the wrong thing to do." But she quelled the panic rising in her.

"I thought you were braver than that," she continued. "I thought a man who could ask a strange

girl to kiss him had more courage. I—I'm ashamed, Jerry."

"You are not strange to me, Allison," was all he said. He repeated her name, "Allison." Then his eyes closed and he turned his face from her. "Please go away," he said wearily.

"No," the girl told him firmly. "I will not go away. You want me to leave you so that you can sink back into a stupor where you don't have to think, where you don't have to face things like a man. Until you can tell me why you will not face things I will not leave."

Slowly, gently, as if she were questioning a child, she drew from him the story of Bender, but even when it was all told it was still incomplete to her. "It's not a case of shell shock," she thought. "Only extreme exhaustion, complicated by a nasty wound. That in itself is enough. And his conscience is tender." She knew it would be.

"If what you did was wrong," she told him very matter-of-fact, "you are not righting it by refusing to get well. I don't quite see why you are responsible—" She broke off. "If you are responsible for the death of this young friend, then you must get well in order to do his work as well as your own. Do you understand me, Jerry? You must get well so that you can do the work Bender can never do now."

His lips moved in what might have been a

promise, but his eyelids drooped in his tired face and she did not dare to press him further. Outwardly composed the girl left the convent, but with her heart in a turmoil. "He was so strong at St. Jean and again at Pierrefonds," she thought. "And now he is like this."

But next day Sister Maxene had even a better report to make. "The fever has broken and the wound heals. You have a certain magic, Mademoiselle." There was a touch of jealousy in her voice although she was unaware of it.

Allison Porter hardly answered. An order was in the pocket of her uniform and because of it her mind was in a confusion of indecision. But before Jerry had opened his eyes she had been able to decide. "I want to stay more than anything else in the world," she told herself. "I'm afraid to leave him now, and it would be possible to stay with a little lying and wire-pulling, but I can't. It isn't playing the game I'm asking him to play."

At her first words the smile faded from Jerry's lips. "My outfit has ordered me to Brest," she said. "And I have to go at once. There's a camion leaving for Paris in twenty minutes and I shall take that."

"Allison!" His voice was despairing, hurt like an unjustly punished child, and his hand stopped fumbling for hers.

"I know," she said hurriedly. "I don't want to

go either, Jerry, but it's the war and we both have to see it through wherever it calls us. Are you going to see it through? As you promised me last night?"

He turned his face slowly away.

"You'll be gone again, forever," he answered.

"I shall be back," she told him confidently, "in three weeks. Then you will be well again and ready to go to the front." Bending, she kissed his unresponsive face.

"Three weeks," he whispered, as if to impress it on his mind.

Abruptly the girl left the ward. "I couldn't tell him that this is a permanent transfer," she thought miserably. "He'll be thinking about it until the time is up and then he'll be well enough not to care. It doesn't matter what he thinks so long as he gets well."

In the ward the wounded soldiers prepared themselves for another day of peace and monotony.

Jerry was sitting on the edge of his bed, breeches drawn over his hospital clothes, when Aristide, the old orderly, brought him a letter. He and Aristide had become good friends in the interval since the American had been brought to the convent hospital.

"What woman is this from?" the old man demanded, and held the letter behind his back.

"Give it to me, you drunken old ruffian," Jerry said in English and expeditiously extracted it from the orderly's grasp.

"What love words are those?" demanded the orderly. "Ha, you are growing strong, too strong. I shall advise monsieur le major to discharge you at once instead of next week. This is not a hospital for lame ducks." He departed chuckling.

Jerry turned the letter listlessly. "I thought it might be from her, but of course she wouldn't write if she's coming back in two days." Then he opened it. The note was very brief.

"DEAR TOWER: We are in for a hot time again and if you are in any shape to rejoin us I wish you would at once. We have moved up a bit, but you can find us through the French transportation at Creil.

"H. C. BUTT, 1st Lieut. U.S.A.A.S."

For a moment a thrill of excitement shook him. Instantly the convent became dull and cold, more dreary than ever. He had lingered overlong there, wandering in the enclosed garden and talking to the nuns. Now he wished to escape, to enter again into a world of action where there were no fever charts nor the smell of anesthetics, and where men were not humbled like children through weakness. His carelessness and his youth had vanished in a somber passion for work. He sought the opportunities that had been denied to Hitchcock and which

Bender had been unable to grasp. Toward Bender his sense of responsibility still persisted, and sometimes at night it seemed as if the boy were by his side, urging him on.

"It's what he would have wished," Jerry thought. "What he always wished. To drive out along the roads, under shellfire, not giving a damn what happened. Well, he can go out now through me." It was the least he could do for Babe who was dead.

He read the letter again and at once his excitement vanished in blank dismay. Lieutenant Butt had written "at once," and to that appeal there could be no delay, but Allison would be returning the day after to-morrow. "I can't do it," he thought desperately, "I can't lose the chance of seeing her again. The war must wait." But he knew that war never waited and that it could not wait.

All day long he wrestled with his problem, turning this way, turning that, trying to find a solution, but before the afternoon inspection had taken place he had decided. "The last time you waited I died," Bender seemed to say.

"Ah," said the doctor, "you Americans are so eager. But then you are not tired like our men. I would have given you some few days longer, but you know best." He signed the papers necessary for discharge.

Jerry went to the orderly. "Aristide," he said urgently, "here is a letter to give to the young lady

who was here almost three weeks ago. Do you remember her?"

"No," Aristide answered placidly, "I do not."

"It makes no difference," Jerry continued. "She will come and she will ask for me. Give her this and do not fail me, *mon vieux*."

"The world is full of women and they are all alike," the orderly muttered crossly, "but I will certainly give it to her if she comes."

It was time for Jerry to go and the convent gates were opening. He had sought for Sister Maxene, wishing to thank her, but the nun could not be found. "After all, what am I to her, but one of thousands she has nursed?" he said.

He was walking through the town to the railroad station. The sharp September wind blew crisp against his face, making it tingle, and from the trees yellow leaves were already drifting in eddies. "It will be bitter cold driving at the front, and hard work," Jerry thought. "I'm glad."

The troop train for Creil, where he should find information as to the location of his section, was already backing and filling in the railroad yard to an accompaniment of shrill whistles. "Like that night at Pierrefonds when I saw Allison," Jerry said to himself while his heart contracted. "But she'll write to me when she gets to the convent. She'll surely write."

It was the afternoon of the next day before

Jerry found his section in the village of Venizel which stood near the River Aisne, tumbled and forlorn above ground, but beneath a formidable system of fortified cellars, made so by German concrete in the days before the Germans had been driven out.

In the courtyard to the largest house Jerry found a mechanic in denims soldering the radiator of a car. "Hello," said Jerry, "where did you come from?" The man's face was strange.

"I came from Paterson, N. J.," answered the mechanic, expertly running a line of solder down a seam, "an' that's God's truth. Who are you?"

"My name's Tower," Jerry told him. "What happened to Holmburg? Not bumped off or anything?" He felt anxious, realizing suddenly that the war had not stopped in spite of his absence. In the tranquillity of the convent it had become dim.

"The shell ain't made that'll get that bird," the mechanic assured him. "He wanted to drive an' drive he would so the loot sent for a new car doctor. That's where I come in. I was stationed in the Rue Ganneron in Paris, sittin' pretty, but it come to me that I'd had enough of wine an' women so I applied. Can you tie that? Now I got a life sentence an' I wish that I was back."

"You'll get used to it after six months or so," Jerry answered unfeelingly. "Where's headquarters? I've got to report."

A flight of stone steps leading to a cellar was indicated to him. "Keep on going," said the mechanic. "They're expecting you. You'd think the war depended on your presence the way Butt's been carrying on."

"Now that was a funny thing to say," Jerry thought as he descended the dark stairs. Promptly he forgot it. "Imagine Holmburg driving a car! And of his own free will! Judkins certainly didn't die in vain."

He found Sergeant Dale in a subcellar reënforced with railroad ties. Two candles burned by his elbow on a table and there was the usual mass of reports before him. They shook hands.

"This looks like a nice safe place, and dark too," Jerry said. "What do you do for air, sergeant?"

Dale grinned. "I don't like it any better than you do, but it's the only place that you could set up a typewriter where it would be reasonably safe and dry. How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Jerry answered. "And I've got a nice little scar for my trouble that nobody'll ever see, worse luck! What's doing up front?"

"Old Maurier certainly is fond of his men. He picks the hottest place available and then tells them to go to it," Dale commented. "They're trying to take a town called Vailly in the direction of the Chemin des Dames. Across the river from here.

All up hill. And there's a line of *postes* up there that would knock your eye out. Celles and Condé and a hole in the ground without a name. I haven't seen any of them, but I've heard tales."

"Good stuff," Jerry answered. "The gang must be tired and you can put me on as soon as you like. I'm ready for work and there's a little extra work I want to do on my own account." He was unable to mention Bender who in spirit would be driving beside him.

Sergeant Dale was silent for so long that Jerry looked at him in surprise. "What's the matter?"

"You may not like it, but you're not going to drive again so long as this war lasts if I can help it." Dale checked the exclamation on the younger man's lips. "It's this way, Jerry: I'm through. Yep, the old man's done for at forty-nine, which is about a hundred in this outfit of kids." His smile was twisted. "My rheumatism is so damn bad that I can't stick it any longer and so Butt is retiring me to base headquarters at Ferrières for treatment. Damn it, I wanted to see this through," he said bitterly, "but I can't."

Jerry stared at him in silence. This was more shattering than news of an allied defeat. He could not imagine the section without Dale, quiet, efficient, contained, at its head. He did not want to.

"The long and short of it is that the outfit's got

to have a new sergeant," Dale concluded. "And you're to be the man. Butt's only waiting to hear from you before he puts it through."

Seconds passed before Jerry understood, then a gust of rage shook him. This was the end of his high dreams for redeeming Bender's wasted life; it was the end of the promise he had made to Allison.

"I don't want it!" he cried. "The most thankless job in the whole army!"

Dale smiled dryly. "I didn't know you understood so well. Listen, son. Don't you know yet that we never get what we want in this life, and particularly in the army? A job comes along and we take it and make the best of it, that's all."

"But I'm not even a corporal," Jerry objected. "The other non-coms will be after my hide every minute, and what will the men say?"

"They'll say plenty," Dale agreed, "and the non-coms, too. But you'll live it down—you'll have to. We don't want a strange top sergeant assigned to us. The men wouldn't like it and it would impair their work. The loot and I are both agreed as to that. You know the men—their weaknesses and their strength. Also you speak French well enough to get on with the Frogs. I've been handicapped there, but you won't be. I know that you don't like paper work and that you do like action, but that's not the question. You can argue with me until you're black in the face whether war is right or wrong,

and I shan't contradict; but right or wrong war is a game played by certain rules and the first of those rules is discipline. Now you're needed in a certain job for which you have certain qualifications, and the question is: Are you going to take that job and put it through like a man, or are you going to act like an undisciplined cub?"

"Discipline." The word had caught in Jerry's mind. Thomas Bender had been undisciplined once; it was there for all to see. Was he to follow willfully in the boy's footsteps? A moment ago he had thought by courage and gallantry to build a monument to the dead boy, but that was gone. There was another monument to build, within himself. Resignation flowed into him for the inevitable, as Hitchcock had been resigned, and he sighed.

"Very well," he said, "I will."

Sergeant Dale was shaking his hand. "That's right. I knew you would. And now I'll tell you something to console you: By the time you get through with this outfit, if you ever are, you'll be as proud of it as I am, and that's saying a hell of a lot."

The men were lined up for mess and Lieutenant Butt was addressing them, telling them of their new sergeant. They looked at Jerry curiously with conflicting emotions, but Jerry did not care. Presently he knew that the lieutenant would turn to

him and that in a voice conscious and faint he would give the order to dismiss. When that moment came his new work would have begun and somehow he would see it through. Now he looked toward the front where the sunset guns were firing. A rocket rose, gleaming palely in the fading light, and was gone. It seemed very far away.

The daze which held the inhabitants of Eplessier throughout the momentous day seemed to be dissipated by night. They had walked about the streets questioning one another timidly with tremulous smiles, assured then doubtful, unable to believe the fact which the silence proclaimed—that there was no longer the sound of guns.

But as evening drew down on the valley the fear and hesitation holding them in check was lost in celebration. Wood, precious wood, was hauled from cellars and bon fires were lighted in the streets. Flags were brought from secret recesses, flags creased from four years of disuse, to be hung from upper windows in announcement of the fact that there would be no more war. Among the French flags were others on which women had stitched during the day, crudely wrought emblems that Eplessier had not contemplated or even imagined a full four years before—English, Italian, Belgian, American, they waved beside their ally the length of the street. No candles were lighted to-night on the bal-

cony of the *mairie*, for there were no candles left to light.

From the country about Eplessier people were coming in—from the outlying farms, Hors, Sablons and Les Loupettes. They tramped along the white roads in their worn best clothes and broken shoes; they stood wide-eyed before the *mairie* while an officer read to them the terms of armistice. Victory!

Somebody had broached a cask of wine and the people drank. Discordant music was coming from a drum and a piano dragged to one corner of the Place Bucot and the people danced. They danced wildly, desperately, like children who had lost their innocence; holding hands they swept in widening circles about the fires, and they shouted, striving to forget the faces which should have been here, striving to forget the losses which had come to Eplessier, to Hors and Les Loupettes. Some English soldiers marooned for the night and a few French poilus joined in the dance. Rank was forgotten, and race. Officers danced with privates, tumbling, sprawling, rising again. An Englishman and a Frenchman were solemnly exchanging parts of their uniforms while the people cheered. More wine had been brought from a hidden store and they drank to victory and forgetfulness. Chairs and tables were being tossed on the fires and the flames rose higher, glowing crimson

on the shattered houses and the white crosses beneath the tower of the church.

Renée turned to her grandmother. They were standing in the doorway of the house where they had a room, the old woman leaning on her cane, the girl beside her, tall and straight, her eyes steady.

"It is gay, is it not?" she commented.

"You do not dance," Madame Collette answered.

"No, I do not dance."

The crowd surged nearer to them and then broke away in wild gyrations. They were beckoning, shouting through cupped hands. There was a movement at the farther end of the street; some men were running.

"Look," said Madame Collette. "More soldiers."

Renée turned suddenly, leaning forward the better to see the new arrivals through the crowd. They were French. "Yes," she returned indifferently. "More soldiers." To herself she thought, "He could not come to-night. He is lost somewhere in the Argonne or the Vosges."

The old woman was growing tired; for a time it had all seemed very clear to her, but now her mind was clouding again and she did not understand. "Why are they dancing?" she muttered. "I think I remember that there is work to be done. Renée, I want to return to Hautefontaine. My cabbages and my wheat."

It was another evening and once again they were installed in the ruined farm. The barns had gone, the fields were plowed by breaking shells and of the house all that was livable was the kitchen, but that sufficed their needs. There were no cows to milk and the horses that were taken had never been replaced. In the fields some vegetables remained, rotting in the damp autumn. For their other food it was necessary to walk daily to Eplessier, but Renée agreed that it was better to be home. With the return of refugees there was not room for them in the town.

"It was here that I first saw him," the girl thought, "and it is to this place that he will come back."

A soldier was far off walking along the highroad and Renée saw him as he turned the bend. Her eyes never missed anyone who passed that way. His uniform was blue and even at that distance she could see it was ragged and old with wear. "Some one returning to a farm," she thought, "perhaps to Les Loupettes." But she did not consider the man further. Even though he were a former neighbor still she had no interest in him now.

She resumed her work while her thoughts ran on in monotone: "He will not come back; I deceive myself. After that last night I knew that he would not come back but still I hope. It was a cruel war that took everything and gave nothing in return.

Grandmother is content. To her the war meant the right to work hard growing cabbages in security and peace. Maybe she sees more clearly than the others, and that is all it was. I shall work then, until my back is bent and I am old before my time, but it will make no difference for I shall be working alone. Jarrie," she whispered in sudden anguish, "it would have been so easy with you."

There was a sound behind her and she turned. The man in blue was coming up the lane. He was young, but his face seemed tired, and old with lines of pain. A blue-black stubble of beard showed against his chin, and on his temples the black hair was flecked with gray. One arm was missing and the empty sleeve of his coat had been pinned across his breast. There was an assumption of nonchalance in his walk, but in effect it was a shamble.

He smiled, but even with that sudden flash she did not understand. His one hand was outstretched. "Renée," he said, "I've come back."

For an instant all the blood in her body seemed to be concentrated in her face. Then it flowed away again, leaving her pale and cold, but in her heart was a sudden swelling of pain and fear.

"Jacques! Jacques L'Empreur!" she whispered. "I thought you were dead!"

"Dead?" he answered, and there was a note of feverish fretfulness in his voice. "No, I was taken prisoner, but I have been living for this." He was

beside her now, his one arm raising as if to draw her close. She did not see it.

"Your bracelet with your number on it was found," she insisted. "Later, when you did not write or return we all supposed—" She did not finish, conscious of the futility of arguing something which was untrue.

"I did write," he insisted, "when I had learned how again." Apprehensively she glanced at his empty right sleeve. "But before then I was very ill, as you may imagine."

"We never got your letter."

"It was sent through Switzerland. Then I wrote again." His voice had become flat.

"But we were not at Hautefontaine," Renée cried as an explanation occurred to her. "And Eplessier was evacuated."

"That is, of course, so," Jacques agreed. "We were told that even Paris was taken, but I never believed that. Never. And so I did not write again. Later I tried to escape and they would not let me write." He smiled sadly, touching his empty sleeve. "I got away one kilometer, not more."

The pain in her heart was warming into pity. His gayety was gone, but the reckless spirit still survived. A marked man, with one arm. And he had tried to escape!

"Are you not tired?" she asked gently. "We will sit down."

Side by side they sat on the step before the ruined house while Jacques talked on. Broken sentences penetrated to the girl's mind, but she hardly listened. "We were at Magdeburg for a time, and then later . . . Wire about us always, and guards. . . . But the doctor was kind. . . ."

"Presently he will ask me," she was thinking, "and what shall I say?"

"I do not sleep," he was complaining, "but here in the sun I can rest and soon I shall be well. Beside you, Renée, I can recover my health."

She did not answer for so long that the man looked at her sharply.

"What is it? You are not married, or engaged?"

Renée hesitated. He was shattered as his country had been shattered; he was tired and ill, but she was strong. Losses had come to Eplessier ever since the first gun—Dupuy who had shot himself, old Bouvet, the horticulturist, who had strangely died—that endless list of casualties throughout the commune—so many losses that she could no longer remember. But here was one who had been saved to them. Without her he might better never have returned, but with her—What she imagined to be a miracle had taken place years before in the church when she had given him her word. Later she had doubted that miracle, but now in the fulfillment of time the reason for it had come to pass. This was God's will and her duty. So she believed, but

still she paused while he waited. There had been enough losses. Then before she spoke she looked once more along the road. It was empty as far as the eye could see.

"No," she answered. "I am free. Dear Jacques."

His arm was about her and his rough face was pressed against hers. "For me it has been futile—all waste," he lamented after a time. "I did nothing for my country and I lost my arm and four years of you."

"We all lost something," Renée answered. Gently, as if she were comforting a child, she drew him closer.

Madame Collette appeared around a ruined barn on the edge of a distant field. Very thin and bent in her black dress, she stood staring across her land.

"Your grandmother?" Jacques asked. "She at least must be happy still to have her farm."

"This is the house," Renée said. "The barns are gone and there are no longer any cattle."

"But the soil is still here," Jacques told her. "We will make it bloom again."

It was almost dark before the great ship that was to take them home had drawn out from the slip at Brest. The men had marched on board, heavily clanking, file on file, until the decks were a moving mass of troops. Alone, Jerry had brought his section from the camp sunk in mud on the coast.

Alone because Lieutenant Butt had left him. With the armistice he had sought and obtained a transfer. Technically the section was now in charge of a casual officer who was never visible; actually it was in charge of First Sergeant Jerry Tower.

"If you ask those M.P.'s on the dock who won the war they'll haul you right off the boat," he warned the men. "Now mind your business and keep your eyes straight ahead. We came over together, and we're going back the same way."

There were nevertheless some mocking shouts as the gap between ship and land widened. Spirits could not be restrained at this visual proof that "the period of the emergency" was almost ended.

From the shore men were waving farewell; there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs farther back from women in the town; faces were lifted toward the ship, faces clear-cut and so close that the emotions playing over them might be read, then fading, as the distance increased, to a white blur.

In all the jumble of khaki, among all that youth shouting gay defiance at the end of a great adventure there was no quiet, and Jerry worked his way back toward the stern. Here a little space was open. On the length of deck in front of it was the section reserved for officers, nurses and women workers in the war, each end screened from intrusion by high wire nets. Save for a couple or so walking in the distance it was empty by comparison with the

crowded decks for the men. Jerry gave it no consideration.

He turned for a last glimpse of France, but immediately the cloud-banks lowering over the coast blotted out the land so that it became misty and unreal as if it had never existed. A sense of disappointment, almost of despair crept over him. The vanishing coast seemed to symbolize his vanished hope of finding Allison in France. During the days of heavy fall fighting, during their endless advance on the heels of a victorious army through Alsace and Lorraine, he had waited for a letter, but it had not come. In every town they had entered and at every canteen he had looked for her, but she was never there. He thought with troubled amusement of his last romantic scheme for finding her—those letters which he had sent broadcast addressed simply to Allison Porter in care of not only the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. but of every other organization he had ever heard about composed of women, or who had women in their ranks. His appeal had been simple: "I hear we are sailing almost immediately from Brest. Come if you can or write." There had been no reply.

A letter was in his pocket and he touched it with uncertain fingers, but he did not draw it out. It was not the letter he had hoped for and already he knew the contents too well. So it had not been unwarranted alarm on his mother's part after all in

her letter of months ago, he reflected. She had said then that his father was not well, but she had not stressed it. He realized now that she, who had not been given to concealing anything, had been concealing from him the gravity of his father's illness, trying to spare the son. He had crumpled that letter in his hand, tossing it away with the exclamation, "They don't understand!" But evidently those at home had understood, a little.

But now the necessity for sparing him was past and this second letter was urgent. They needed him at once; there was his father's place to take as head of the house, his father's work to look forward to in the bank. Just that and no more—a round of dull duties.

"I'm going back, but I won't stay," Jerry thought gloomily. "I can't help it if they do need me, I have something else to do. Allison." Even now her name set his heart to beating faster. "I must find her," he whispered. "Even though she never wrote, she's mine. It couldn't be otherwise. It wasn't just friendship ripening into love; I saw her only three times. It was something deeper which happened before we ever met. I've got to find her if I search every state and town in the country." His need for her was so great that he felt almost ill, but through it persisted a feeling of guilt toward his family and his hand dropped away from the letter.

Astern the strange dark cloud had now entirely

covered the distant land. It billowed low, drifting out to sea, and Jerry's thoughts drifted with it.

"I ought to go and call the roll; there'll be an inspection soon," he muttered, reluctant to relinquish this moment of freedom. There were men on that roll who would never answer to their names again—Judkins—Hitchcock—Bender. For a moment they were remembered, but presently they would be merged with that glittering company which would pass down the years, heroic in proportion, all alike, a company to be regarded with awe, the subject for sagas, superhuman and unreal, the hopes and fears that had moved them lost to view. A legendary company, dimly seen, marching forward into time—their flags forgotten. By the mere act of dying these men had become heroes and this was a hero's fate.

"What was the war about?" Jerry wondered. "What did it accomplish?" He could not, he realized, answer that. Perhaps the historian would point merely to the integrity of certain soil, the rebuke to violation of it which Madame Collette had prayed for. But there should be more than that, he felt. Who plowed in certain fields was not eventually important.

"Oh, well," he thought of the men who had died. "They tried to do their duty anyway."

He had said once of Judkins, that, since his death had redeemed Holmburg, he had not died in

vain. Even now he was beginning to see these men in the light of posterity, miraculously changed through their deaths and different from himself, for he was not at all conscious of the result that the curious sequence of events beginning with his first visit to Hautefontaine and culminating with the death of Bender had had on him. He was aware only that his youth had gone in graveness, and that his irresponsibility had been saddled with care.

Abruptly he dragged his thoughts from the dead to the living—to this outfit in his charge and which still needed him. He felt a sense of pride toward them. "I've done a good job and even Dale would say so," he admitted. But there was no accompanying elation.

"What's wrong with me?" he asked aloud.

A familiar voice seemed to be speaking in his ear. Dale's? "Are you going to take that job and put it through, or are you going to act like an undisciplined cub?" His mind flashed back to the cellar in Venizel when he had been offered the sergeantcy, but the voice was not speaking of that. Defiantly he turned as if to shut it out, but it seemed to be singing on and on through the wind.

"So that's it," Jerry said slowly. "Well, I'm going back to Waynesboro to do my job because I can't decently shirk it." He breathed deeply, making his great decision. "And so help me, God, I'm going without a hopeless search, to find Allison."

For the first time he admitted to himself that without a clew it was hopeless. The finality of it should have crushed him, but immediately the feeling of resignation and peace which Hitchcock had once known was flowing into him.

From the middle of the crowded deck a voice was raised for a moment in plaintive, ironic song, directed at the long, bare sweep of the officers' walk:

"I've got a Sam Browne belt an' a pair of spurs an' everything—" It drifted away across the sea and was lost in the thunder of the wind.

Jerry smiled, thinking of his former lieutenant. "I must go and see what chance the gang has of being in the first mess-line," he thought. But he did not move.

Behind the wire screen of the officers' deck a girl had laughed at the song, a clear, well-known laugh that he could not forget ever. The ship was melting away beneath his feet and he was in St. Jean au Bois; he was in Pierrefonds again and he was lying wounded and weak in the convent. Darkness had settled across the water, but to Jerry it was bright with a strange glow.

"It's not real," he muttered. "It can't be. It's like that other voice inside myself."

But the girl had laughed again and this time there could be no doubt. She was nearer to the wire barrier. The conviction of the beginning of another

great adventure was growing within him, and his heart began to swell. Rigidly, his hands clenched, his lips parted in a stiff smile, Jerry began walking toward the voice.

T H E
J O H N D A Y



C O M P A N Y
I N C.

